



PHD

Ways of knowing: can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning?

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**Ways of Knowing:
Can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search
for meaning?**

Joan Walton

**Submitted to meet the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

University of Bath

School of Management

February 2008

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Ways of Knowing: Can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning?

Joan Walton

Abstract

My enquiry starts when I experience the suffering of young people in care, and realise I do not have the knowledge to help them. I find that traditional ways of knowing in western culture – Christian theistic religion and classical Newtonian science – do not provide me with the knowledge required to resolve this ignorance. Intuitively, I feel there must be more effective ways of knowing. This thesis records my search for a way of knowing that enables me to find meaning in a world where such suffering is possible.

This search has taken me to many places. Intellectually, my sources of theory and information include the social sciences, philosophy, depth and transpersonal psychology, eastern and western religions, quantum physics, and a science of consciousness. Professionally, I have moved from social work, to education, and then to the development of my own business.

In engaging with an ‘experiment in depth’, I develop a meditative and journaling practice which connects me to a sense of a loving dynamic energy with limitless creative potential. I realise that over time, through being ‘true to myself’, my connection with this source provides me with a spiritual resilience which enables me to retain equanimity within life’s challenges.

The hypothesis that feels meaningful and makes most sense of my experience is that I am involved in an evolution of consciousness, where the story of humanity is the story of ‘self-disclosure of spirit’ (Ferrer 2002). My experience of synchronicity provides evidence of a principle of interconnection and integration between psyche and matter, inner and outer, theory and action, science and spirituality.

Through telling my personal story, I offer an emergent methodology that includes both narrative inquiry and action research. I generate a living theory which offers ‘spiritual resilience gained through connection with a loving dynamic energy’ as an original standard of judgment.

Prologue

In retrospect, an early experience that made me aware of ‘different ways of knowing’ happened when I was sixteen years of age. I decided to leave confirmation classes, and not become a member of the Methodist Church.

Up to that moment, I cannot recall having any problems with the church. Apart from suffering relatively normal childhood boredom when I had to sit through services, I took church attendance for granted. I have no memory of having difficulty with my parents’ faith and Christian practice, nor of it overly affecting what was generally a happy childhood.

I was in a confirmation class when suddenly the possible implications of what the minister was saying dawned on me. I immediately checked out my concern with him: that is whether, in being confirmed, I was committing myself to certain beliefs that he was talking about. I received an affirmative reply; so I decided I could not continue, as I had no means of knowing whether what he was saying was true or not; hence, there was no firm basis for belief.

It was not the decision to leave the class in itself that made me aware of different ways of knowing; but rather the dissonance that was created between my feelings about doing this; and my parents’ horrified response when I told them what I had done.

I experienced the conflict quite extremely. I knew my parents loved me completely; my way of expressing my experience of their love was to say that they ‘would go to the end of the world and back’ for me. Because they loved me, they wanted what was best for me; and for them the ‘best’ included passing on to me their belief system, which was so important to them. They were both devout Christians; I had been born in Kenya, where they had gone with the Church of Scotland Mission immediately after their marriage. They had good reason to be Christians; the Church had provided them with support when they badly needed it, and offered a way of life that gave them happiness and meaning. They wanted their children also to benefit from this. They truly believed that following the teachings of the church formed the basis of a ‘good life’; and to depart from these meant there was a strong chance that evil forces would influence behaviour.

I don’t think I realised to what an extent they felt this, until I returned home that evening, and told them what I had done. I cannot remember the details; all I remember is this powerful sense of them feeling my very soul was at risk; that this was truly an awful decision, the consequences of which could be dire.

My puzzlement and confusion were great. Here were two people who would give their lives for me, clearly devastated at the implications of a decision I had made; and yet I could not, either rationally or emotionally, understand what their concern was. I knew my soul (whatever was meant by that) was not at risk; and I could not see how rejecting Christianity would have any other adverse effects on my life.

I say I 'knew' this; I had a strong intuitive feeling that I would be okay. It felt so certain that I would indeed have called it knowledge; and yet I could see too that my parents 'knew'; it seemed also from an inner source of knowing, which had emerged out of their own experience.

So at that early stage in my life, I was faced with the enigma: how do you know what knowledge is valid or not? I had my own 'inner knowing'; the certainty that not being confirmed would not leave me more open to evil forces; and if I looked to the external world, there seemed to be plenty of 'evidence' to support that feeling. Many scientists, for example, denied the existence of good and evil forces, and stated that knowledge consisted of that which could be observed and verified through use of the five senses. However, here were my parents, whom I knew (inner knowing again?!) were as honest as it was possible to be, and whom I trusted completely, apparently experiencing an 'inner knowing' that was in conflict with mine; and they too had external support for their personal 'knowing'. The Christian Church taught that true knowledge came from God alone; and only through adhering to the teachings and doctrines of the Church was it possible to gain that knowledge. Faith, prayer and maintaining the Ten Commandments were requirements for this; 'proof' as interpreted by science was neither possible nor necessary.

I was faced at that early stage with a major decision to make: repress my own feelings, adopt my parents' beliefs, and be rewarded by their approval, and a warm welcome by the church community; or accept my experience as valid, and encounter the concern and critical judgement of my parents. Had they been different people, I might have been confronted by a more extreme response: for example, rejection and scorn. However, their love has always been stronger than their critical judgements; and when I decided that Hamlet's edict 'to thine own self be true' was a principle I wanted to live by, they accepted that as my choice. Not everyone is so fortunate. Individuals, pursuing a different form of 'knowing' to the families or communities which have raised them, can be ostracised and even thrown out if they fail to conform. In some contexts, especially religious ones, a person is faced with the stark choice of accepting that which is held to be 'knowledge' by their community; or rebelling completely, and being forced to move elsewhere, to build a completely new way of living and set of relationships. Psychologically, this is a huge challenge; and one that some don't survive.

Fortunately, this was not the situation that faced me. Although they were not happy about it, my parents accepted my decision, and life went on much as normal. However, the experience had left its mark. They had a faith, a belief system, a way of knowing, that had no meaning for me. At that age, I do not recall this leaving a gap; any sense of meaning I needed was to be found in my relationships with friends, and with living my social life to the full. It was not till later, when I left school and started work, that the question of meaning arose; and with it a need to find a way of knowing that satisfied my search for meaning. But once the question made its presence felt, it was not easily resolved.....

Introduction

This revised introduction has been written as a consequence of the recommendations of the examiners following the viva voce. They suggested that the thesis as a whole would benefit from an introduction which provided a clear framing and signposting for the thesis, and explained exactly what I was trying to achieve within the thesis, why and how. Specifically I should include:

1. *A more explicit explanation about what I mean by ‘ways of knowing’ and the different kinds of experiences / information the thesis draws on in order to provide meaning.*
2. *An explanation of the methodological framework, with suitable references to methodological literature.*

I have addressed these points in the following sections, so that the reader is clear from the outset in relation to my response to these issues.

My main aim in this thesis is to reflect on and record my search for a ‘way of knowing’ that can be intellectually justified, and feels experientially meaningful. In other words, I seek a way of knowing that has coherence: where there is a resonance between theory and all aspects of my experience.

The enquiry on which this thesis is based began as I strove to make sense of the world during my late teens, when I found myself struggling with questions around pain and suffering, meaning and purpose. I sought to develop an epistemology and ontology that were congruent with my moment-by-moment experience of living in the world; where the ontology and epistemology both informed and were informed by that moment-by-moment experience; such that my way of knowing, my theory of being, and what was manifested through the living of my life, had a coherence and a continuing mutually sustaining influence on each other. This is truly, in Whitehead’s (1989) terms a ‘living theory’ which is generated and tested through a form of action research undertaken in order to improve action in the world, that specifically seeks to understand and make an informed theoretical and practical response to core life questions such as ‘why is there so much pain and suffering in the world, and what can be done to alleviate them?’, in ways that feel experientially meaningful, and which seek to communicate the validity, meaning and value of those experiences in a rationally defensible way. This has become a life long enquiry; and the thesis aims to provide a reflective narrative of that enquiry, written in a way that will offer the reader a framework and signposts to guide their own existential living-theory enquiry.

Ways of Knowing

The examiners requested that I be more explicit about what is meant by a ‘way of knowing’ within my thesis, and the different kinds of experience / information that the thesis draws on in order to find meaning. This section provides a response to that request.

The trigger for the enquiry that forms the basis of this thesis was a desire to discover whether it was possible for me to develop a way of knowing that felt meaningful to me, but which also was evidentially based; that is, I could say to others: “this is not just a

faith that I hold, nor a set of beliefs, for which there is no evidence. Rather, I want to be able to demonstrate how I come to hold this belief in ways which are testable by others; and I can provide evidence to support my findings.”

My reason for initiating such an enquiry at that stage of my life was a direct consequence of my experiencing the world as fundamentally meaningless. At the age of 18, entering my first job as a residential child care worker, I was faced with the pain and suffering of young people in the care system who had been taken away from their own family homes, often as a result of neglect, abuse and violence. I wanted to help alleviate their pain and suffering; but was unable to find the means to do so.

At that early age, I experienced what for me was a major revelation. Despite the fact that human beings had apparently been in existence for many thousands, if not millions of years; and despite the vast amount of research and learning that had taken place and been recorded in many academic institutions around the world, there was no definitive knowledge about the causes and solutions to pain, suffering and violence. Nor did it seem that we were any closer to gaining such knowledge. Observing the world around me, I realised that the suffering I was experiencing from the children in my care was a mere microcosm of the suffering that was evident in the world, as a result of (for example) wars, exploitation, abuse, torture, and widespread poverty. The capacity of human beings to inflict pain on others seemed limitless.

This realisation caused me to question life at a very fundamental and profound level. What meaning could there be to an existence in which such extensive pain and suffering was possible? It seemed to me then that the answer was ‘no meaning at all’. I became greatly depressed by that response, and could find no rational, intellectual route out of the depression. I began to understand why many people appeared to use alcohol, drugs, or other forms of addictive behaviour as a means of escaping the relentless ‘unknowingness’ of life. I could feel myself getting drawn into such behaviours.

I searched around for a ‘way of knowing’ that would provide me with satisfactory answers to questions concerning pain and suffering, which might then allow me to feel that there was indeed a meaning to existence. Up to that point, in the western culture in which I lived, I had experienced two ways of knowing that each claimed certainty, though having very different grounds for justifying validity.

The first way of knowing was that promoted by the Christian Church. The voice of God, as heard through the Bible, the teachings of Christ, and as expressed and interpreted through his chosen representatives within the Church, was the main source of knowledge and truth. No tangible evidence for such knowledge was given; ‘faith’ was seen as sufficient grounds for accepting what was deemed to be the truth.

The second way of knowing was the scientific method I had been taught in my school education. Knowledge was based on establishing a hypothesis, then setting up an experiment and observing the results, which would either validate or negate the hypothesis. It relied on information gained through the five senses or extensions of the senses. Any knowledge acquired was based on results that were predictable, empirically based, and repeatable in controlled settings.

Neither way of knowing satisfied my search for meaning. I had been brought up in the Christian Church; but there were many other religions, each with their different interpretations of the truth, each based on faith rather than evidence. Religions

appeared to provide a sense of meaning for those who adhered to them; but there was no rational reason (as far as I could see) for choosing one rather than the other.

Science was evidence-based; however, science as I had experienced it at school did not address subjective experiences such as pain and suffering. Science concerned itself with the physical world, and did not enter into the realm of feelings and emotions. It could provide evidence for knowledge it produced; but not meaning.

It felt to me that in choosing between religion and science, I had to choose between meaning and evidence; which did not feel a satisfactory situation. Neither on its own could offer an evidence-based way of knowing that would provide an explanation and resolution for emotional pain and suffering.

However, from my late teens, I intuitively felt that there was ‘more to life than met the eye’; and I did not want to ignore my strong intuitive feelings just because science suggested they were illusory. On the other hand, I was aware that that my intuition may be deceptive; and using ‘faith’ or ‘personal conviction’ as a means of justifying what my intuition suggested was never an acceptable option for me. Nor was I ever attracted to the idea of accepting a ‘ready-made’ religious faith as a means of making sense of that feeling that there was ‘something more’.

Consequently I was left with the challenge of finding a way of knowing that would help me discover whether there was demonstrable substance (or not) to my intuition that there was ‘something more’ than the material universe which I observed with the five senses; and which would provide me with a meaningful response to core life questions concerning, for example, purpose, pain and suffering.

It was this challenge that started me on my life-long enquiry, and what has felt like a ‘spiritual journey’. Those initial raw experiences in the children’s home, combined with my inability to find an explanation for what I was experiencing within either science or religion, triggered me to find a different ‘way of knowing’ that satisfied my search for meaning, and offered a greater understanding of human experience of pain and suffering.

Because my enquiry spans nearly 40 years, I needed to be selective about which parts of my ‘whole life’ enquiry I chose to focus on in my thesis in order to communicate the learning that emerged from my developing way of knowing. I selected specific ‘critical incidents’ that I perceived as having transformative influences on my enquiry and learning. These include, for example, my initial experiences in residential child care which provide the initial trigger to my deep questioning; the death of my partner which caused me to radically question and re-visit some of the conclusions I had so far reached, and stimulated me to re-engage with my enquiry in a more intense and re-energised way; my experience of joining the Scientific and Medical Network and enquiring with others, which introduced me to the implications of modern science and caused me to radically review the role that recent findings in science had on developing a way of knowing that was not based on the positivist philosophy of classical science; and a three year experience in engaging in a joint inquiry with others, which allowed me to explore, develop and test out findings that had emerged from my individual enquiry. At all stages I was researching literature in an effort to find those who were also committed to developing an active relationship between theory and experience.

Methodological Framework

Finally, the examiners asked me to provide a clear methodological framework, with reference to methodological literature, and to clarify why the chapters / parts have been placed in the order they have.

In the viva, the examiners suggested that my enquiry could perhaps be located within an autoethnographic framework. Autoethnography is described by Ellis and Bochner as a genre of writing which “displays multiple layers of consciousness connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739). They suggest that the distinctions between the cultural and personal become hazy as the writer changes the focus and moves between looking at their own experience and looking at the cultural experience. Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests that “one of the main characteristics of an autoethnographic perspective is that the autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser and the role can be characterised as that of a dual identify.” (p.3)

On reflecting on the comments of the examiners, I could see that in continuing the enquiry from the point I am at now, I could well locate it within an autoethnographic framework. In Part 2 of the thesis, I become more focused on exploring the cultural context within which my enquiry is located; and as I become more secure in ‘the way of knowing I have developed that satisfies my search for meaning’, I also become more motivated to understand how I connect to the wider culture, and how I can better understand my own journey and findings through understanding what is going on within that wider culture.

However, the main aim of autoethnography is to connect the researcher’s personal self to the broader cultural context; and that is not what I initially set out to do, nor does it form a major part of my thesis. I set out to develop a personal response to very fundamental life questions: a personal response that was evidentially based, and could be tested out by others; but I was not seeking until a much later stage in the research to locate my story within the wider culture. Mine was a dynamic investigation in which I was interested in the relationship between inner and outer, personal and professional, theory and practice. The methodological framework I developed needed to be one that allowed for a dynamic investigation of that nature.

My methodological framework has much greater connections with Whitehead’s living theory methodology, which provides an approach appropriate for my particular study as I explore the question ‘Can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning?’ In developing a methodology, it was important to me that it met the criteria of James’ (1912) notion of radical empiricism: that is, nothing should be included which is not directly experienced; nor anything excluded which is directly experienced. Thus, everything within the whole sphere of my experience was potentially open to investigation; and I was aware that different forms of verification needed to be developed other than those used for the study of experiences which were a consequence only of sensory stimulation. This approach allowed for all aspects of my experience, inner and outer, to be seen as valid, of value, and worthy of study.

Whitehead, in describing the development of his ‘living theory’ identifies the fact that the disciplines approach to education was not able to explain educational influences in learning. He recognises the need to develop a valid form of theory that could explain

the “educational influence of individuals in their own learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of social formations in which we live and work”. I would contend that if the disciplines approach is lacking in its ability to truly comprehend how individuals can influence the education of others, how much must the disciplines approach (including philosophy, science, and study of religions) be lacking in its ability to understand how individuals cope with and respond to core questions such as the meaning and purpose of life; how they interpret and make sense of the pain and suffering in their lives and in the lives of others? These are the questions that instigated my enquiry, and which I felt necessitated an engagement with developing an active relationship between theory and personal practice (inner and outer).

This thesis is very much a self study, a personal journey; it focuses on my questions, my experiences, my story. But this is not a self-centred, narcissistic account. Rather, I discovered at an early stage that ‘conventional’ accounts which attempted to grapple with fundamental life issues (e.g. science, religion, philosophy) did not, however much I studied them, provide satisfactory responses to the kinds of questions I asked. The only way I could gain the depth and quality of information I was seeking was to engage in my own enquiry. In so doing, though, I wanted to understand **why** these other disciplines were not satisfactorily addressing such important issues.

Consequently, in developing my own version of Whitehead’s ‘living theory’ approach, I paid attention to my deepest self, to my intuition. I developed a ‘spiritual practice’ which included being in silence, meditation and journaling as a means of enabling me to gain greater access to my ‘deepest self’. Through engaging with this process, I discovered what I experience as a ‘dynamic loving energy with limitless creative possibilities’. More significantly, my continuing relationship with this energy appeared to provide me with a resilience, what I term a ‘spiritual resilience’, which gave me a strength and courage (both practical and useful qualities in daily living) to face up to and move through challenging life experiences.

At the same time, I continued with my academic studies which enabled me to understand more about the benefits and limitations of both science and religion. Action research became an integrated part of my life, as I assimilated insights from academic study into my personal practice, whilst allowing the experience I gained from my personal practice to provide the basis for reflecting on and evaluating ideas and theories. Throughout my enquiry I was constantly asking: these experiences seem rich, profound, transforming – how can I make sense of them? I am not the only person who has entered into such a profound ‘spiritual journey’ – why has science not chosen to focus on what this order of experience has to tell us about the nature of the world, what it means to be human? Religions will generally accept the idea of a spiritual journey; so why can I not find a religion within which I can locate my own very individualised and rigorous enquiry? Philosophy is all about exploring responses to core life questions; so why when I read philosophy, do I read plenty of reflection and theories; but nowhere can I read about how any philosopher has explored how his ideas relate to his own life, and what emerges as a result of his learning gained from integrating ideas and experience?

It seemed to me that Whitehead’s ‘living theory’ methodology had not to date been applied to the kind of questions I was asking in relation to the meaning and purpose of life. Mine is a dynamic search – and in that sense would completely reflect

Whitehead's creative approach. But when I sought other theorists using a similar methodology there was little available. Most writers took one of two approaches: either they took an objective 'third person' rational approach, reading other people's theories, or making a study of other people's experiences and their interpretation of those experiences (which would emphasise the intellectual aspect of the journey); or they engaged in a personal, experiential process and shared that experience (which would emphasise the subjective, 'spiritual' aspects of the journey).

For example Martin (1955), whose writing plays a major role in my own research, writes with a clarity and passion about the urgent need for people to explore deeper parts of the psyche; but he does not share anything of his own exploration, or what personal experiences he has had which enables the reader to understand what he has gained from the process. There are a growing number of writers who are interested in the idea of 'spiritual', and what might be influencing a recent, expanding interest in spirituality. Tacey (2004) discusses the 'spirituality revolution', exploring the benefits of a spiritual reality being taken more seriously, and how the creative potential of the spirit might have a positive role to play in areas such as education, personal experience and care of the environment. Forman (2004) undertakes an extensive survey of a large number of people, as a result of which he suggests there might be an important and profound shift in the nature of spirituality taking place.

In most of the academic literature that I read, though, these theorists are talking **about** spirituality, and commenting on other people's experiences; but the reader comes to the end of their writing knowing little if anything about their own personal exploration or 'spiritual journey'. Given the nature of my enquiry, I desired to find academics who were both engaged in, and willing to share, aspects of their personal spiritual journey. There are other writers who share at length their own experiences. For example, in Ashton et. al. (2006), a number of individuals tell stories about their felt connection with spirit; but they did not seem to feel a need or a requirement to locate their experiences within an evidentially supported theoretical framework, which would provide an intellectual context that could help make sense of their experiences, and make connections with other people's experience and understanding of the world. Many other people who engage deeply in spiritual experiences feel no need nor desire to write about them at all, far less seek to develop an evidentially validated explanation or justification for them.

My problem with books that focused largely on theoretical issues is that they were limited in the issues they addressed, and did not have the means to begin to experientially explore some of the issues that had been present in my enquiry from an early stage. For example, in the information on the back cover of Tacey's (2004) book, it states:

Topics explored include the current state of the Western experience of spirit, (and) our need for spiritual guidance when we cannot turn to organised religion in their traditional forms.

The Spirituality Revolution addresses a major social issue which requires immediate attention if we are to creatively respond to spiralling outbreaks of depression, suicide, addiction and psychological suffering.

However, it was an awareness and experience of issues such as these which had stimulated my enquiry at the age of 18, and which I had dealt with experientially as well as theoretically. I felt my whole thesis represented the kind of ‘creative response’ that was identified in this commentary.

A review of the same book stated:

Is there a universal power beyond that discoverable by the empirical sciences, and if so, is that power worthy of human worship and the exaltation that the word “God” brings? Or may it be, on the contrary, that the great philosophical, psychological and literary pessimists are right, that the cosmos is in the final analysis truly cruel, horrifying and absurd? Surely, these are “spiritual” issues that contemporary philosophy of religion should be considering more directly.”
(Robert Luyster University of Connecticut: Vol. 8, No. 1, January 2007)

It seemed that this review spoke about the dilemma concerning ‘ways of knowing’ that formed the very essence of my thesis, and which I had been actively researching throughout my life through my living-theory enquiry. For me, these issues were of far too great importance to stay within ‘contemporary philosophy of religion’. What I wished to do was encourage through my own example, a far more direct and involved exploration of such issues, which tackled head on challenges related to evidence and validity of findings arising out of such an exploration.

From the outset, I was very clear that I wanted to keep my focus both on engaging in the action research cycle of immersing myself in, reflecting on, and learning from my own experience; and as part of the reflection, reading the ideas and perceptions of others, analysing their relevance and in what ways they might connect with and enhance the understanding gained from my own subjective experience. However, when seeking academic literature written by those with a similar research interest to myself, there was little to be found. I explore at some length the writings of those few who do seek to integrate inner and outer, theory and practice, and find a means of reconciling science with an interest in the spiritual. Academics such as Bache (Professor of Religious Studies at Youngston State University) and Wallace (formerly teaching in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California) write from a perspective which explicitly seeks to integrate the learning gained from deep self-exploration with a rigorous analysis of the theoretical implications of their experience, and hence are particularly significant sources of information in my enquiry.

Part 1 of my thesis is essentially my own personal story over a 32 year period, starting as an 18 year old entering into a role in residential care. It tracks the relationship between my personal experience, and my engagement with theoretical understanding gained from depth psychology, religion, quantum physics, and consciousness studies. In the final chapter of Part 1, I bring together the various threads of my learning and expand on the conclusion I have reached concerning the significance of developing a science of consciousness which integrates inner and outer experience.

Part 2 was written three years after completing the main part of my enquiry, and includes chapters that allow a more ‘objective’ reflection on the outcomes of my ‘living theory.’ In this part, I make further connections between my enquiry and existing literature as a means of providing additional support for the conclusions I reach, and to locate in more detail my own research with the writings and findings of others.

Finally, I look at how I might continue my enquiry beyond the writing of this thesis, and invite others also to develop their own 'living theory' as a means of experientially exploring some of the most significant and critical questions of our time.

Note

A major element in this thesis is the challenge to scientists who claim that science is based on verifiable evidence. My claim is that although the practice of science itself is based on such evidence, the assumptions underpinning science (concerning the view that matter is primary, and that all mental/ spiritual experiences are derived from matter) are speculative rather than evidence based. I argue that these assumptions, known as 'scientism', play a major role in inhibiting the development of imaginative and creative research methodologies, and make it problematic to validate research findings that are not derived from a positivist science. Clearly, there are many scientists and social scientists who are seeking ways of avoiding the fundamentalism inherent in such assumptions. However, when I explore the limitations of science in terms of my own enquiry, these limitations normally exist because of the power of scientism. Because of the specific focus of my thesis, when I mention science and scientists, I am generally referring to those whose work is based on a materialist world view which reflects the assumptions of scientism.

PART I

1970 - 2004

Chapter 1

Framing the Research Question

The issue of practical concern in my professional practice, and the initiating trigger for my enquiry, was when as an 18 year old not long started in full-time work as a ‘houseparent’ in a children’s home, I asked myself:

“How can I gain the knowledge I need to better help these young people, who are experiencing extreme emotional pain and suffering as a result of damaging and abusive experiences, which has led to them being removed from the family home, and put in the care of salaried staff such as myself?”

- At an intellectual level I felt ignorant, because I did not know what I could do to help.
- At a physical level, I suffered badly from hives, an unpleasant skin disorder.
- At an emotional level, I felt upset and distressed in the face of my inadequacy in relieving their distress.
- At a spiritual level, I felt helpless and hopeless; I could see no explanation, meaning or purpose in a world which made this level of pain and suffering acceptable.

I sought a response for each of these in different places:

- I assumed that the intellectual knowledge I required was accessible in some written form somewhere, and that when I started studying, I would gain the required information.
- I would go to the Doctor to find out what to do to make the hives disappear.
- I relied on friends and family to know how to help me deal with my emotional distress.
- I did not know where to start in terms of my deep existential questions; my continuing helplessness led to severe feelings of depression, which seemed to have no means of resolution.

In fact, I soon realised that I could not deal with each of these in isolation. When I visited the Doctor, who told me the hives were a manifestation of severe stress, he was very clear that they would not go until I had done something about the factors causing the stress. Despite the support from my family and friends, which played a major role in helping me manage occasional suicidal feelings, it was not enough to deal with the increasing depression. And when after 2 years I went to University to gain the intellectual knowledge I was looking for, I discovered it did not exist at the level I required. The theories I learned in relation to social work practice with damaged young people did not seem adequate enough to equip me with the skills, wisdom and confidence I needed to truly understand and help them. Nor could I find much to help my own depression either! The interconnectedness of intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual was evident even then.

So although the question ‘How can I gain the knowledge I need to better help these young people?’ remained, I found that my continuing inability to gain this knowledge led to wider questions concerning the reasons for pain and suffering.

Then I began to realise that the troubled lives of these young people were but one symptom of a fragmented, diseased society. Other symptoms included addictive behaviours, violence, exploitation and corporate greed. In order to deal with the symptoms, it was important to look for the causes, and to do something about them.

Because of my continuing depression, and the realisation that what I was experiencing was a symptom of something much deeper, I knew that if I were ever to come to an understanding of what was going on in the wider world, I had first to come to an understanding of myself.

Consequently, my enquiry moved very quickly onto a different level. As it progressed, the issue of meaning began to assert itself as primary within my own life; and that unless I could find a satisfactory response to personal questions of meaning, and the closely connected one of purpose, I had little motivation to pursue other questions. It was not possible to achieve this through intellectual methods of knowing alone; it would also require me to experientially explore the deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions of life.

So my research question was eventually reframed as:

Ways of Knowing: Can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning?

The issue then became: Was I accurate in thinking that in understanding myself, I could reach a better understanding of what was going on in the wider world? This led me to locate my own experience within a wider context, and connect with others who were asking similar questions. It seems to me that the many problems which face us nationally and globally do indeed have their roots in an inability to find an adequate response to questions that are ultimately about meaning and the nature of truth; and that much of the pain and suffering in the world arises from conflicts that are created between individuals, groups and nations pursuing different ways of knowing in their attempt, not only to respond to such questions, but to impose their answers on others.

In this respect my thesis is very much a personal response to core life questions. It is my hope that in telling the story of my life-long enquiry, and locating my unique experience within a wider cultural and historical context, I am able to make an original and thoughtful contribution to what I would suggest is one of the most important and pressing questions of our time.

Chapter 2

Having My Eyes Opened

At the age of 18, having failed to gain a place at university, I started work as an 'assistant housemother' in a children's home. This was a live-in role, and was the first time I had lived away from my family. In this chapter, I document my growing awareness of a lack of a way of knowing that would give me the answers I needed.

As I remember it, the first occurrence of my being severely challenged by a difficult young person occurred during my second day of employment as a residential child carer. I have no memory of the interchange that led up to the incident. All I hold in my mind is a vision of David, a thirteen year old boy, sitting on a window-sill of a first floor bedroom with his legs dangling on the outside of the building, threatening to jump. I recall my fearful pleading with him not to do so – but do not know how long it was before he actually brought his full body back into the room.

My next clear memory is of the 'Residential Homes Advisor' visiting the following day, and hearing of the incident. "You should have told him to jump, and walked away" she said. "He was testing you out and would not have done anything – and if you had appeared to ignore him, he would have come back in immediately". I was confused – and shocked. I did not understand. Why should any young person act in that kind of way? It was without my bounds of experience and comprehension.

I was eighteen years of age, and had been brought up in a secure and loving family. My parents were strict – but mainly from motives of protectiveness – they did not wish me to come to any harm. I was bright, and the intention was that I go to university – but I did not get the required A-Level grades. The main alternative at that time for young people in my position was to enter into teacher-training. However, I was sure I did not want to be a teacher. Many years previously, as part of a Sunday-School Christmas activity, I had visited a children's home close to where I lived. I decided then that I wanted to be a child care officer – the job title for a person who specialised in working with young people in the care system, before the publication of the Seebohm Report which was responsible for the creation of generic social work departments. When on leaving school, I was looking through the papers and saw an advertisement for an assistant houseparent placed by a small voluntary children's organisation, I decided to apply – and was successful.

What did I expect? Heaven knows. Probably unfortunate little children, whose parents had either died, or who had been neglected by them, and would respond gratefully to people who would be prepared to look after them. I certainly carried an idealistic notion of children's behaviour, and did not foresee having any problems with this. I was not a natural conformer to adult standards, and saw myself as something of a rebel. As a

young teenager, I was regularly in trouble with my parents, and the teachers at my privileged school, and I did not feel myself to be any angel. But essentially, as I now realise, my experiences of life by the time I left secondary education were incredibly limited – and my perception of being someone who deviated from the norm was relative to the norms of my peer group, and within a wider social context, much exaggerated.

The learning I gained through those first fifteen months in residential child care probably represented the steepest learning curve I have experienced previously or since. Certainly, I lived through more negative distress during that time than in any other period. I felt as though I had been plunged into greater forms of human disturbance and despair than I could ever imagine to have existed.

The house itself was a large, pleasant three storey building in good sized gardens, in the centre of Cheadle Hulme in Cheshire. A white upper-class area, it was difficult to walk past the building, and believe that it contained other than a happy, affluent family. I along with Janette, the other assistant houseparent, had as our bedrooms the two small rooms that were on the third floor. The children and the main houseparents, Tess and Pete, had bedrooms on the first floor. Tess was my boss – and at the age of twenty-three, with nine months experience in this line of work, was the experienced one of us. Her husband, Pete, was not one of the staff. As was normal practice at that time, he went out to his own work during the day, and for free food and lodging was expected to play a ‘fatherly’ role to the children in evenings and at weekends. Janette was twenty-one, and had started only two months prior to myself. Between us, we were expected to care for eight children coming from very difficult backgrounds. This was 1970, before the forty hour week was introduced; so we lived, ate and slept within those four walls, only going out when we had to take the children somewhere.

Living so closely with people whom I had not chosen to be with was like living in a hot-house of emotionally-charged energies. Not only this, but there was a disturbance about the emotional fields that was unsettling. Looking back, I think the most damaging aspect of that time in my life was that, after only knowing what it was like to live in a home where I was loved and wanted, I was suddenly thrown into a context which was sated with high levels of emotional pain. Worse still, I had no idea what was happening. I was experiencing distress and the consequences of trauma – but did not know that that was what was going on, far less understand its effects and consequences for me or for others.

I cannot fully communicate the intensity and awfulness of those months. At most, I can give a number of case studies through which I can attempt to convey aspects of my experience.

Trevor is the child that stays most in my mind. He was one of the children there when I joined – a lively seven year old. He had a four year old sister, who was nearer eighteen months in developmental terms. In their family home, Pamela was kept strapped in a pram for the whole of her life, severely physically and emotionally neglected. Brought into care several months before I started, Pamela had been unable to eat by herself or talk, and was not toilet trained. She was progressing slowly – the damage was great – and it would be a long time before she would reach her chronological age in terms of her behaviour. Trevor, for whatever reason, had caught up more quickly, though he still acted younger than his age. We took to each other from the moment we met, and the

bond continued throughout the time I was there. It was a sustaining relationship for him and for me during months of great turbulence with other children in the home.

As time went on, I knew that I could not stay living in that place. I was bored – during the day, when the children were at school, we had nothing to do except housework. At the beginning, there was no washing machine – and six out of the eight children wet their beds. Each morning, it was my task to hand wash the wet bedding – along with anything else that needed washing. In the evening, I had to prepare a meal for twelve people. Being someone who had never had to do any domestic work at home, and had only cooked occasionally out of choice in order to create a ‘treat’ for parents or family friends, this was no small burden – especially as my expectation had been that I would be living a carefree hedonistic life at university.

When the children came home, nothing was predictable. There were eternal discipline problems – and I had no real idea of where to start. Three out of the eight children were teenagers – and I was still a teenager myself. Because I was small for my age, I looked younger than my eighteen years also. I wasn’t old enough to look after myself far less disturbed children.

But everything with Trevor was fine – until I began to realise the implications of leaving. I could not take Trevor with me – but how was I – or he – going to live without each other? I learned the hard, hard way how all carers of young people should retain some kind of emotional separateness from children with whom they are unlikely to have a long term relationship. It sounds hard – cruel – what child does not need the close emotional bond of a caring adult? But as I have come to understand in the years since – the loss of a carer to whom a child is attached is one of the most damaging experiences that a young person can have. When the experience is repeated, it is teaching a child that adults cannot be trusted, and that it is unwise to develop relationships with them. They learn to stay detached – not to feel love and care – and become emotionally cold. It is the only safe place for them. They have come to know that if they develop a close bond with someone, then all they can expect is the most excruciating pain when that person goes – which they learn to feel is inevitable. And out of that pain comes the need to lash out in some kind of way. This may be in the form of violence and anger at what is seen to be a hostile world – or in forms of self-destructive behaviour, if they believe that these dreadful things happen because of their own personal failings and inadequacies. Trevor, in building a bond with me, had not yet reached that stage of distrust. However, I have no doubt that the hurt caused by my breaking that bond will have adversely affected his approach to relationships with other adults. Those who profess to care for children are too often not sufficiently aware of how they can, often inadvertently, perpetuate and increase the damage that has already been done to them. I carried a huge sense of responsibility about this for many years. I escaped strong feelings of personal guilt, because I was aware that I had been acting out of ignorance and was a victim in this also. I missed Trevor tremendously. But I also knew that I had emotional reserves and opportunities in my future that Trevor did not have.

Most children who came to the home had already suffered repeated forms of abuse. One family particularly stays in my mind. This family of four arrived about two months after I had started in post. Their father was in prison after threatening the headmaster of their school with an axe. Their mother was in a psychiatric hospital, suffering from a

long-term mental illness. Neither was due to be allowed back into the community for many years. Violence and instability had been a central part of those children's family experience.

Each child exhibited their disturbance in different ways. Bernadette was twelve, going on eighteen. Attractive, sexually precocious and 'charming', she knew how to manipulate the adults in her life. She would be pleasant to their faces, and devious behind their backs. If crossed, she could become like a wild-cat. I still have the scar I received from her nails digging into me on New Year's Eve, when I had sole care of all the children, and she decided that she was not happy with me. She threw herself at me – bit me, scratched me, calling me all the vile names she could think of. I had to phone for help – before eventually being released from duty sometime after midnight, and for the first time ever, drinking myself unconscious!

Tom was nine years of age; his habit was to destroy furniture and other property when he was crossed. On a number of occasions, he would pick up chairs and throw them across the room, often at someone, if they were getting in his way. Consequently, he got considerable attention, with people spending time trying to calm him down. Peter was seven; when he arrived, he was the quiet one. He would sit in the corner, and play with his toys. Everyone said how good he was – and left him alone. One day, Peter flipped – and behaved in a way that completely modelled his brother. Suddenly, people were paying him attention also. This taught me a lot about the need to spend equivalent time with all children, whether or not they are demanding attention. Everyone needs to feel others care enough about them to want to do things with them – and if they don't experience that, they feel rejected, unloved, and respond accordingly.

John was only five. My abiding memory of John is my feeling that it was possible to call a five year old child 'evil'. His eyes would look at me in ways that sent a chill down my spine. He was devious like his sister – but without the superficial charm. I remember asking the children to behave at a meal to which had been invited a particularly important visitor – an official representative of the organisation for which I worked. John spent the whole meal saying 'shit' - 'shite' - 'tits' in monotonous rotation, and adopting gross eating habits that I had not previously known him engage in. As the only member of staff present, I had no idea how to deal with this – and I did so very badly. From my present standpoint, I can now smile at this, and be aware of a range of ways of responding. However, at the time, it was hugely embarrassing, and did nothing to enhance my self confidence.

Loss of confidence became a huge issue for me. By the time I came to leave the children's home, virtually all the self-assurance I had had on leaving school had gone. I was depressed through living in what I experienced as a negative and emotionally destructive environment. I was overwhelmed by the sheer scale of deprivation and abuse that was prevalent in these children's lives, and felt completely inadequate to do anything about it. I remember sitting on the stairs outside one young boy's bedroom as he lay sobbing his heart out, calling for his Dad. However, his father was nowhere around. This lad's crying appeared to be in vain. My feelings of distress, and my anger that it was possible to have a world where such acute pain existed, were intense. I longed to be able to find a way forward from this dire situation.

During my time in that role, I experienced the lowest points of my life. I had my eyes opened to the distressful situations in which many children live. I did not have the knowledge to help. At the same time, because of the live-in nature of the job with only limited time off, I had little social life of my own. I felt I was doing nothing meaningful or of value – and the nature of the experience was such that I continually questioned whether life itself was worthwhile.

I have no memory of actually thinking I might commit suicide. However, I was able to relate to people who did. I could feel what it is like to believe that there is no point in going on – that the effort of getting through each day is so hard that the easiest way out is to end it all.

Fortunately for me, there were options I could plan for that meant I did not have to stay in that situation. The main one was to start studying again, and re-take A-levels with the intention of going to University. After leaving residential care I took a 9.00a.m. – 5.00p.m. office job, which left my evenings and weekends free for learning.

Chapter 3

Discovering the Unconscious

I left residential care, feeling traumatised. Not only did I feel inadequate in terms of what I could do for the young people in my care; I had discovered just how extensive my own ignorance was. These included my inability to find acceptable responses to core life questions such as: What are the causes of pain, suffering and violence? What possible meaning can there be in a world where such pain, suffering and violence is possible? How can I understand and deal with my own depression?

For as long as I could remember, I had intuitively felt there was more going on underneath the surface of life than was immediately obvious; but I had not previously thought that I would encounter so much that was disturbing. I felt lonely, alienated, and confused.

Thus began a search for a way of knowing that would help me make a useful response to the relentless questions, and deal with my feelings of distress and helplessness. It was the beginning of an exciting if often scary and uncertain journey.

My life was to be transformed by reading Carl Jung's autobiography, and discovering depth psychology.

In the months immediately leaving my work in residential care, I continued to profoundly question the true nature of the world, and why such ignorance should exist. I then encountered Carl Jung's autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, which struck a significant chord in me. The reading of it represented a turning point, which resulted in my learning how to become more actively and consciously involved in an exploration of the deeper reaches of human experience.

An initial attraction to Jung as a person was that he spoke of experiences to which I could relate. He had an awareness of the external world; but also of another dimension that was not accessible through normal perception. Jung states:

The difference between most people and myself is that for me the 'dividing walls' are transparent. This is my peculiarity. Others find these walls so opaque that they see nothing behind them and therefore think nothing is there. To some extent I perceive the processes going on in the background, and that gives me an inner certainty. People who see nothing have no certainties and can draw no conclusions – or do not trust them even if they do. I do not know what started me off perceiving the stream of life. Probably the unconscious itself. Or perhaps my early dreams. They determined my course from the beginning.

Knowledge of processes in the background early shaped my relationship to the world. Basically, that relationship was the same in my childhood as it is to this day. As a child I felt myself to be alone, and I am still, because I know things and must hint at things which others apparently know nothing of, and for the most part do not want to know. Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible. (1961/1995: 389)

At the time of reading this, I felt also that I could experience transparent dividing lines between different orders of reality – and it was reassuring to hear that I was not alone. Of course, knowing what and who I know now, I am aware that there were many others who felt the same – but we were all caught in the ‘loneliness’ of feeling that these were unacceptable areas of conversations and joint exploration; one of the tragic consequences of the way our culture defines reality.

Jung’s story fascinated me. What impacted most strongly was his growing apprehension that our reality as human beings extended far beyond that of which we were consciously aware. Jung was not the first person to express an awareness of this. Frank Tallis suggests:

Perhaps the first individual to acknowledge that some parts of the mind are necessarily unavailable for introspection was St. Augustine. He wrote ‘I cannot grasp all that I am’, meaning that at any single point in time he could be aware of only a fraction of his totality. All his memories and knowledge – most of what contributed to his sense of self – remained beyond awareness. Augustine recognised that consciousness has a limited capacity. ... We feel the presence of our unconscious mind like a ghost. Invisible, but nevertheless somehow there. (2002: ix)

The workings of the unconscious have been given the credit for many creations. Goethe, Mozart and Blake have all produced great works of art which seemed to emerge into external form already complete. There are scientists and mathematicians, including Poincaré, Bohr and Einstein, who stated that the solutions to complex problems came to them at a time when they were not working at it – for example, after sleeping, or whilst they were engaged in mindless, routine tasks.

Many people recognise the existence of the unconscious as being that part of themselves, hidden from awareness, but which influences attitudes and behaviour. Later in the thesis, I explore the concepts and experience of consciousness and the unconscious in greater depth. At this stage in my life, my reading was more restricted. However, even then, I was aware of differences arising when people attempted to understand the origins, scope and purpose of the unconscious. In the debate over what these might be, Freud’s role was significant.

In his Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, written between 1915 and 1917, Sigmund Freud, ...by emphasising the importance of the unconscious processes in mental life, ...suggested that our most valued characteristics – free will, rationality and a sense of self – are mere illusions, and that we are all the products of unconscious and uncontrollable forces in the mind. (ibid: x-xi)

Carl Jung was in complete accord with Freud in relation to the immense importance of the unconscious. However, he went far beyond Freud in developing his understanding of what this was, by introducing into it a spiritual dimension. Freud considered that the unconscious held materials that had their origins in conscious awareness, but which were then repressed because the individual for some reason could not tolerate them. Jung believed that, not only did we have a personal unconscious which contained our individualised store of experiences – but there was also a collective unconscious which was a repository for universally shared symbols and memories. He introduced the concept of the *Unus Mundus*, which he described as:

The potential world of the first day of creation, when nothing was yet ‘in actu’, i.e. divided into two and many, but was still one A potential world, the eternal Ground of all empirical being, just as the self is the ground and origin of the individual personality past, present, and future. (1963: 534)

The characteristics and role of the unconscious, and the nature of its relationship with what goes on at a conscious level has always appeared to me to be a central question, of relevance to all that we do. The possibility that there was a whole dimension to existence to which we did not have immediate access on a day-to-day level, but which nevertheless played an integral part in all that went on, resonated at some deep level within me. I was sure that life was far more complex than I had been led to believe through the majority of my education. However, I could not fathom either the nature or the extent of that complexity.

Jung’s own understanding of the nature of the unconscious came out of his experience of a time of mental instability. He found that as the mechanisms which held the unconscious in check broke down, elements of the unconscious erupted into his life. He knew he was encountering a psychic disturbance – and decided to give way and see what the unconscious had to say to him. In his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he talks about his ‘Confrontation with the Unconscious’, where he goes into detail of the vivid dreams and images he experienced. He ends the chapter by saying:

It has taken me virtually forty-five years to distil within the vessel of my scientific work the things I experienced and wrote down at that time. As a young man my goal had been to accomplish something in my science. But then, I hit upon this stream of lava, and the heat of its fires reshaped my life. That was the primal stuff which compelled me to work upon it, and my works are a more or less successful endeavour to incorporate this incandescent matter into the contemporary picture of the world.

The years when I was pursuing my inner images were the most important in my life – in them everything essential was decided. It all began then; the later details are only supplements and clarifications of the material that burst forth from the unconscious, and at first swamped me. It was the *prima material* for a lifetime’s work. (1961/1995: 225)

It is difficult to describe the impact that the reading of Jung’s autobiography made on me both then and subsequently. Many years later, as a ‘party game’ during a social event, I, with others, was asked: “If you could have the opportunity to have at your right shoulder just one person who has notably influenced you, who would that be?” My instinctive response was to say: ‘Carl Jung’. The fact that my response was so immediate and certain gave me cause for reflection – I was not aware up to that point

that I perceived him to be of such significance. It was not as though I agreed with all that he said, nor necessarily with the way he lived his life. However, there was clearly something about the areas he was prepared to journey to in himself that I appreciated. He also experienced and spoke from depths to which I could connect strongly. I **knew** there was a reality to which we did not have immediate conscious access. Jung not only acknowledged this; but he entered fully into the exploration of it in ways that, although often alien to me, tugged a heart string.

I could sense there were deeper parts of myself that I was not accessing, and, despite an interest, was not sure how to do so in a way that was safe. I recall being aware of a belief in psychic energies that, again intuitively, I sensed were not necessarily 'healthy'. For this reason, I chose never to engage in experimentation with, for example, ouija boards, which was a fairly common practice amongst my age group. I felt that if I became involved in such practices, I would be out of control of what happened, and may well encounter negative energies that would be of benefit to no-one. Even if these energies were positive, I could not see a valuable purpose for this kind of activity.

Looking back, I have no idea why I thought in this way. All I know is that I was aware of a reality to which I was connected that went beyond that of normal daily consciousness; that there could be a value in accessing that wider reality, and in so doing, expand my own experience of consciousness; but that if I were to do so, I needed to use a means where I was in control, and had some way of monitoring and managing what emerged. It was important that I took responsibility for choices I made, and did not find myself in a situation where I was abdicating personal responsibility to 'other beings or being'.

I required some direction. I wanted to explore the world that I perceived was there. Reading Jung's work, I was reassured that this perception may represent something real, rather than be solely a product of my imagination. However, I needed guidance as to how I could in a practical way move forward.

Then – opportunistically – synchronistically - I discovered a book, which through reading and working with it, was to transform how I lived my life. "An Experiment in Depth", written by P.W. Martin, was published in 1955.

In his foreword, Martin outlines his intent:

The experiment in depth set out in the ensuing pages derives mainly from the work of three men: C.G. Jung, the psychologist; T.S.Eliot, the poet; and A.J. Toynbee, the historian. Each of them, in his own way, has employed what Eliot once termed the 'mythical method' – the exploration of those symbols, visions, idées-forces which, acting powerfully from the unconscious depths, enable men and communities to find new energies, new values and new aims.

He states:

The central purpose in the experiment in depth (is to discover) how consciousness and the unconscious can be enabled to work together. (ibid: 36)

Martin's work builds explicitly on Jung's psychology, and in particular, what Jung termed the 'constructive technique' – methods of encouraging the unconscious to reveal

what was going on in an externally expressed form. These methods include active imagination, dream analysis and spontaneous painting.

Originally, Jung developed this work with people who were suffering some kind of mental illness. However, he discovered that the technique was useful, not only in this context, but as a means of enquiry into the nature of life. He found that:

Insofar as consciousness took a co-operative attitude towards the unconscious, the unconscious itself grew increasingly co-operative. (ibid: 8)

This constructive activity of the unconscious was not restricted to neurotic patients. Normal men and women, provided they were prepared to take the trouble and run the risks, also experienced this flow of life-bringing (energy), and underwent a profound change in values and attitude as a consequence. In other words, this source of new energy was not a kind of psychological antibody, produced by the psyche to combat neuroses. It was an integral part of normal life, at present virtually ignored. (ibid: 10)

In reading about these techniques, where people were encouraged to look within, and find some means of expressing without what they found there, I found it interesting that Arnold Toynbee was looking at the same kind of process at a social level. Martin, in analyzing Toynbee's contribution, suggests that, when a civilization encounters a 'time of troubles':

At such a juncture according to Toynbee's reading of world events, men and women here and there turn from the macrocosm of the outer world to the microcosm of the human psyche. There, in some manner, they find the answer to the challenge racking their society to death; and, turning again to the outer world, form the nucleus of a 'creative minority' which, if it is successful in transmitting its vision to the great mass of the people, leads the civilization through the time of troubles to new creative achievement.

This process of withdrawal-and-return clearly ties in with Jung's discovery of the constructive activity of the unconscious. (From different experiences), the same possibility emerges: that in the unknown realm the other side of consciousness, creative forces are at work which may at times be channeled into human affairs with life-giving effect. (ibid: 14)

Martin then goes on to explore what it is people might be encountering when they access their unconscious through the process of withdrawal. He believes that what they contact is their 'deep centre'. This is described as a sense of connection with:

something lying beyond the ego-consciousness but which nevertheless affects consciousness. And the effect of the deep centre is to transform, integrate, re-create the human being who finds and holds to it. (ibid: 133)

He sees T.S. Eliot as struggling in his own way to find the creative activity operating the other side of consciousness, the life-bringing symbol floating up from the unknown. Eliot writes:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong things; there is yet faith

But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

Martin also introduces the thinking of William James – who has his own way of describing what is going on:

People become conscious that they have a higher part that is conterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of them, and which they can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save themselves when all their lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck. (ibid: 132)

This idea of the MORE has been understood in various ways through the ages.

Some creeds regard the MORE as wholly ‘other’, the contact coming solely through grace. Some regard the MORE as part of the human being; or the human being as part of the MORE. Others again see the MORE as, at one and the same time, immanent and transcendent. In the different theologies, the attributes of the MORE fill many pages, usually including omniscience, omnipresence, and the like. (ibid: 178)

Many thinkers and writers, then, were aware of a dimension of themselves which was not normally recognised in daily living, and for which there was no clear and rational explanation. People struggled to describe an experience that was essentially intangible. Martin’s contention is that depth psychology – the psychology of the unconscious – is a potential means of developing a greater understanding of the whole of our experience which may have beneficial consequences for the quality of our life. However, it is not a process that can be undertaken lightly. Martin goes to great lengths to describe, not only what he feels the promise is in developing an ‘experiment in depth’; but also what he considers to be possible pitfalls and dangers. It has great relevance to issues that were to face me.

Jung, Eliot and Toynbee are men who, in this time of troubles, have sought new vision in the depths. They are, as it were, the spearpoints of a possible creative minority, dedicated to a new birth of freedom. At present, though, they are spearpoints only. The question examined here is whether and how, on the basis of their discoveries, the peoples of the world can find the means of creative renewal.

In fairness to the reader, it should be emphasised that this is not an armchair pursuit. What is proposed is an experiment, an experiment involving risk, making heavy demands upon those who undertake it, with no guarantee of results. Mythos meant originally the words spoken in a ritual, the means of approach to the God. Jung’s constructive technique, Eliot’s mythical method, Toynbee’s withdrawal-and-return are so many modern means of approach to the creative process working in and through man. And, as always, the creative is dangerous.

Superimposed upon this is the fact that, at present, we know very little about this range of activity. For something over a century there has been a tendency to restrict the field of scientific enquiry to those areas where assured results can be obtained. Science has been sacrificed to the pursuit of certainty. As is now

becoming realised, science is not primarily concerned with certainty. Its primary concern is that, in the free search for truth, the methods used shall be the most appropriate that can be devised. But because of this undue restriction upon scientific enquiry, large areas of human experience have remained virtually uninvestigated: especially that immense realm of energetic phenomena with which religions and ideologies deal. As a consequence, in the ensuing pages there is scarcely a statement of any importance that can be looked upon as scientifically based. We swim in a sea of hypotheses; hypotheses founded upon experience, it is true, but the kind of experience in which the possibility of self-deception is practically limitless.

(...This book) does not pretend to be in any sense a scientific work. It is an attempt to draw attention to certain vital phenomena to which, it is hoped, the scientific method can eventually be applied. But we have first to become aware of these phenomena and their possible relevance to life. The purpose here is, so far as may be, to communicate that awareness. (ibid: 36)

Martin's writing both attracted and excited me. Here was someone who was not only taking for granted the 'depths' that I sensed existed; but was proposing a way forward that would encourage a proper exploration of what was there in a way that would work in the best interests of humanity as a whole. The latter point, and the value base that it implied, were important to me. This was not just enquiry for its own sake. Martin was writing in the mid fifties, at a time when the cold war was at its height. He feared the dangers of totalitarianism, and wanted to find a way of creating a different kind of society:

How to win the cold war is the crucial question of the age. Only in part is this a political question. Essentially, and in the main, it is religious. The struggle is for the spirit of man. And it is here that psychology can, perhaps, render unique service. It can enable science and religion to work together as never before. (ibid: 198)

The unconscious is not fundamentally a menace, a source of fear and misgiving. It is the well-spring of life, both for the individual and for the peoples of the world. At present we are cut off from it; and worse than cut off, exposed to the utmost peril. Little as we may like it, we of the present century have no choice but to live dangerously, the threat of mass destruction over all our heads. Those who have the psychological strength and stamina to undertake the withdrawal-and-return – to live dangerously to some purpose – are the fortunate ones. Whether or not a creative minority comes into existence as a result of their efforts, they live. (ibid: 207-208)

By what means a creative minority can come into being in this present day and age is something of which we have no direct knowledge. But ...if it is to be effective, (it) needs to penetrate every sphere of human existence. It ...depends upon the responsible men and women in all walks of life: the teachers, doctors, industrialists, housewives, nurses, bank-clerks, miners, drivers, seamen, farmers, civil servants, engineers and a hundred others. They alone can change the values, the practices, the institutions by which we live: and it is by deeds, much more than by words, that the great majority of the peoples of the world will be reached. (ibid: 257-258)

The thesis of the experiment in depth is that this life can be recovered, that the creative reality behind religion is there for the finding: and that by this means it is possible not so much to defeat, as to transcend, the totalitarian technique. A new instrument of discovery has become available. It is for us now to use it aright. When the people of the world come to know the 'truth about God', not by hearsay only but by direct encounter, the cold war can be won – for both sides. ...there is in this present age a possibility of greatness exceeding all that has gone before, the possibility that our time of troubles can become the timeless moment, the moment of vision and of commitment. (ibid: 264-265)

I was reading these words in 1973, at a different historical point. In addition, although aware of the dangers that existed globally, my motivation at that time was primarily inspired by my experiences at a more local level – that is, what could be done to ensure that young people such as those I had been working with, did not have to experience so much pain and distress on a continuing basis. However, whatever the origins of an individual's driving force to find ways of creating a better world, I believed that coming to an improved understanding of 'what goes on underneath the surface' of human experience was going to be crucial for any long term sustainable solutions to the problems that beset us. The idea that it was possible for people to work in a planned and systematic way to gain this awareness greatly appealed to me. I was interested in finding out more about this 'experiment in depth', as it potentially offered me a way forward in my own search for an expanded knowledge base.

Martin explores at length the relationship between religion and science. At the time of my initial reading, I was not giving much attention to either of these areas; I had no reason to. However, reading Martin enabled me to see them both in a different perspective.

He suggests that the relationship between science and religion is one that is out of balance:

The religions of the world are ...living myths. This does not mean that they are 'mythical' in the ordinary sense. The living myth may also be the living truth. But religions have this strange emotive power, working upon individuals and communities, changing their whole way of life.

In the course of the last three hundred years a great new force has come into operation, profoundly affecting the living myth. This force is science. Its influence upon religions and upon ideologies has been fundamental, and fundamentally different. Upon religious beliefs the effect has been caustic. It has undermined, cast ridicule upon, 'debunked' most of the dogma of most of the religions; with the consequence that mankind to a great and increasing extent is now cut off from that means of approach to the living myth.

...As a consequence, at the present time we have a world in which the living myth comes to people very little by way of religionFrom this it results that the peoples whose culture and civilisation were originally based upon religion find themselves, in a fashion, cut off from their roots, uncertain, undecided, unsure of themselves and of life.

.....In some strange way science, the free search for truth, seems to have betrayed both us and itself. To all appearance, it is helping those who would suppress it. There is, however, another possibility. Perhaps it is not science

that has betrayed us but we who have betrayed science. And this, on the whole, seems the likelier hypothesis. So far we have pursued the easy side of science, the side that can be readily 'proved', the side that yields quick results in profit and power, the side giving that comfortable feeling of certainty. The difficult side, the side that does not lend itself to conclusive demonstration, the side that punctures our vanities and does not directly advance our fortunes, the science of the human as a spiritual being, this we have not pursued with anything approaching the same ardour. Only now is it beginning to be developed. Particularly this is true of all enquiry into the depths of the human psyche. There we are still in the stage of partisan beliefs. And because of this lack of balance, because we know a great deal about atomic fission but next to nothing about human integration, we are paying the penalty of one-sided development: disruption. (ibid: 5)

Martin believes that psychology can enable science and religion to work together in ways that have not been previously possible. He recognises that science and religion each have a number of different meanings, and it is necessary to be explicit as to which of the meanings is intended. Where religion is rigidly dogmatic, science has little to contribute. However, he maintains that religion based upon experience is in a totally different category. Here, science can be of service – as long as there is an explicit understanding as to what is meant by 'science' in this context. Some people define science as the body of tested knowledge brought together by mankind. Science with this meaning has, as yet, little to contribute to a comprehension of the realm dealt with by religion. A second way of interpreting science is to consider it as a method of discovering truth - a process consisting essentially of (1) the systematic observation of a situation; (2) the forming of hypotheses based upon such observation; (3) verification of these hypotheses by more intensive and/or more extensive reference to information relevant to the situation; (4) re-shaping of the hypotheses as a result of this verification; and so on, continuously, in a progressive deepening and widening of knowledge.

Science, thus considered as a method of discovering truth, Martin goes on to say, can be applied to religion wherever religion is based upon experience. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James used this method as far as was possible with the data available to him. Taking the religious experience of the 'more developed minds' of different periods, different cultures, different faiths, and comparing them with one another as best he could, he arrived at certain tentative conclusions:

1. The process starts with the realisation that there is *something wrong about us* as we naturally stand;
2. This leads to the discovery of the 'germinal higher part' in a man;
3. This germinal higher part is 'coterminous and continuous' with a MORE of like quality;
4. From the contact with the MORE by way of the germinal higher part, the 'real being' forms.

William James applied the first two stages of the scientific process. He systematically observed facts, and on this basis of this, worked out his hypothesis. But he was not able to verify or progressively reshape the hypothesis. He had only a limited amount of data available, and no means of putting this to the test.

However, Martin suggests, if a range of people were to use Jung's constructive technique, it could be possible to develop to some extent the psycho-perceptive faculties often used by mystics, and so become more aware of the processes at work at a deeper level of consciousness. In this way, the application of the scientific method to religious experience can be established on a new basis. This can be achieved if a sufficient number of individuals undertake the experiment in depth, and record their experience in relevant form.

So for the first time in human history, science and religion have the opportunity to work together. However, he acknowledges there are challenges in applying a scientific method to the workings of the unconscious. The first difficulty lies in the nature of the experience. We are not here dealing with the 'objective' world – that is, the world that reaches us by means of the five senses. Rather, our attention is on the trans-subjective world, using methods of inner perception.

Secondly, there can be no certainty about any conclusions reached, only an increasing degree of probability. Each person's experience will be unique to themselves. However, as each person shares that experience, it may be that there are certain features of those experiences that are sufficiently common to provide a body of corroborative experience which deepens and widens as an increasing number of independent investigators make the experiment.

Martin asks:

Is scientific method to be restricted to those areas where something approaching certainty can be achieved? If so, we condemn all those pioneers of science who in the past went forward, under every disadvantage, bent on discovering what they could with such instruments as they had; and by their courage and determination built up the body of scientific knowledge we now possess. And we condemn science itself to a meagre and misleading existence, based as it would be on such fragmentary knowledge as can be acquired by the so-called 'exact' techniques; ignoring that the small segment of reality thus adventitiously explored would be just as likely to distort as to illuminate our view of the whole.

Clearly, scientific investigation cannot be thus confined. It is true that where the pursuit of science is little more than a personal activity, or where the feeling of certainty it brings is clutched at as a substitute for religion, there is a natural tendency to play safe and refuse to apply scientific method anywhere outside the accepted ruts. But where the scientific spirit truly moves there can be little doubt as to what should be its scope of enquiry. Scientific method is for the discovery of truth on all fronts, the psyche no less than the physical world. And since our knowledge of the psyche is far behind that of the physical world, the investigation itself far more difficult, and the issues at stake infinitely more momentous, it is on this sector that we need to concentrate. (ibid: 201-202)

It is necessary that men and women should undertake the experiment in depth in their own lives; and report back on what they encounter. ...The essence of the experiment is that there shall be no rigid following of doctrines laid down, but instead a dialectical process of discovery: on the one hand, a continuous formulation and reformulation of hypotheses, to serve as guide for the individual experiment; on the other, a continuous intensive verification of these hypotheses as the individual experiments proceed. (ibid: 202)

By this means it should be feasible to make at least a first beginning towards setting the experiment in depth upon a scientific basis, so far as such a thing is possible. Until this is done, we remain in virtual ignorance of those forces – demonic, ambivalent, potentially creative – at present wrecking innumerable lives, threatening to wreck the world.

There is here an immense new field of activity for the social sciences, the sciences of man. Whether they are capable of rising to such a challenge remains to be seen. A development of methodology which involves a development of faculties latent in the scientist himself is not to everyone's taste. A development in scope and concept which relates the social sciences directly to the greatest social and psychological problems of the age is a widening of responsibility many would hesitate to accept. But this much seems reasonably certain. In the experiment in depth, social scientists have possibilities of action-research vastly surpassing in importance anything so far undertaken by man: an unexpected universe of experience, in which all the great inventions wait to be made. ...As and when (an) understanding of the human spirit is reached, psychology, science and religion can work as one. (ibid: 204)

A Personal Account of the Experiment in Depth

I have written extensively about my reading of the *Experiment in Depth*, because of the profound effect it had on me in my early twenties, with consequent implications for the road I selected to follow. Martin brought my attention to several factors that were to have a major influence on me throughout my enquiry.

Firstly, he allowed me to see both science and religion in a very different way. He differentiated between religion based on dogma, and religion based on experience. That immediately made sense to me. The religion I experienced in my confirmation classes was one based on dogma. However, my intimations of there being a reality that existed both within and beyond me, and which was a source of help and guidance, corresponded with William James' idea of a "MORE which is operative in the universeand which (you) can keep in working touch with". Moreover, this was an **experience** I had; it was not a belief I had been given. If what I experienced could be interpreted as religious, then perhaps I needed to be more open about my views on religion.

Similarly, I had previously paid no attention to science, as I had known it only to be concerned with studying the physical world. However, if I could see it, not just as a 'body of tested knowledge', but as a 'method of discovering truth', based on a systematic process of forming and testing hypotheses in any aspect of human experience, then perhaps I needed also to be more open about my views on the value of science. If Martin were to be believed, the issues that I was interested in investigating could benefit from developing a mutually informing relationship between science and religion.

Secondly, this was the first time I had come across the concept of action research. To me, the idea of following a dialectical process of forming hypotheses to guide action, then evaluating the hypothesis in the light of what transpired, immediately suggested a means of exploring any aspect of human experience, whilst maintaining a level of rigour and accountability.

Finally, it helped me find a way to investigate for myself the relevance and value of exploring the nature of the relationship between the unconscious and conscious. Martin had identified that there were a range of methods which could be used to enable the unconscious to reveal what was going on in some external form of expression. The one that most immediately appealed to me was the practice of journaling. I was already keeping a diary, and had done so since the age of sixteen. What I wrote was probably typical of most teenagers; I recorded issues as they were happening to me. However, up to this point in time, the entries had been written at a relatively superficial level.

Now, I had a different intent. I believed that there was a level of life to which I did not have immediate access. I intuitively felt that if I were able to reach it, whatever existed there could help me considerably in improving the quality of my life.

As I write this thesis, I want to try to capture what it felt like for me at that time. Although the section that follows is written in the present tense, I do not claim it was what I was then consciously thinking. However, on reflecting back, I do believe it accurately represents what was going on for me.

I am responding intuitively to a powerful feeling that is constantly within me. I have, in large measure, bracketed out my rational mind. This is not because I have dispensed with my rational capacity – it is more complex than that. It is as though my rational mind has told me that I am to dispense with it for the moment, as there is a far more important force that I should listen to. It is hovering there in the background, ready to step in, in an emergency. In the meantime, it is actually quite keen to learn from what happens when it puts itself in the observer role.

What is this other force? This is the question I want to explore – but I am not too sure how to. Jung suggests a series of approaches within his ‘constructive technique’ – and writing is the method that seems right for me. Writing which is not planned nor consciously thought through before the pen makes contact with the paper. Rather, I suspend my thinking, and as far as is possible, create a connection between the pen in my hand and my inner voice. In other words, my rational mind is leaving the space clear for the inner voice to communicate directly through the pen. I relax, and let the unconscious parts of me produce uncensored that which it wishes to say.

This issue of not censoring what was written was a difficult one. Despite its wish to remain distant, the temptation for my rational mind to gate-keep what came through was strong. A major issue was a worry that others may find what I had written and read it! The possible embarrassment of someone reading material that was completely uninhibited was immense. The only way I could free myself from that was to promise myself on each occasion that, if I felt at the end of writing that it really should not stay in existence, I could immediately burn it. Giving myself this internal permission was liberating, and did succeed in removing that particular barrier.

The other major difficulty took rather more time to resolve. I could feel the writing taking me to unknown regions of my consciousness. It was a chosen and desired journey; but because it was uncharted territory for me, I felt I had to take care. Martin had pre-warned about the potential hazards.

The experiment in depth can be unduly dangerous. When we deal with the deep unconscious, we are dealing with the depths from which, only yesterday as it were, consciousness emerged. In doing so, inevitably, we place consciousness in peril. To take upon oneself to apply the constructive technique in one's own life, a man needs not only resolution but psychological stamina. Without it, the risk is too great. If you do not have it – and we are all made as we are made – keep away. To recognise that there are some things one is not fitted to do, is not cowardice but wisdom. (ibid: 37)

I knew I needed to move forward slowly. I was faced with the paradox of retaining control of a process in which the aim was to give up control. Allowing the rational part of my mind to remain a distant observer, such that it could step in if things started to go wrong, but did not at all block the flow of what came from the unconscious, was a huge challenge.

Martin acknowledges this issue. He stresses the need for:

Serious attention, involvement and objectivity: together with a basic steadfastness of spirit. At first sight, involvement and objectivity may appear difficult to reconcile. What I mean by this is that a man must be wholly committed to the experiment, not regard it merely as an intellectual excursion; but at the same time repeatedly stand back from it, bring to bear upon it the maximum of conscious awareness. For unless he is wholly committed he will get nowhere. And if he fails to bring to bear upon it the maximum of conscious awareness, the experiment is liable to run away with him. (ibid: 36)

Martin does suggest that, because of the risks, engaging in the experiment in depth is worth doing with a group.

From the outset anyone undertaking the experiment in depth is well advised to do everything in his power to bring into operation two great integrative factors: the fellowship of a working group; and the contact with the deep centre. (ibid: 236)

This may be ideal – but for me, there were two reasons why I could not work in a group at that stage of my life. Firstly, I did not know anyone with whom I could even talk about this, far less suggest they engage with me in the enterprise! My greatest problem at the time was probably my feeling of isolation in this respect. In fact, there was a period of time when I did wonder if I was mentally imbalanced, as I could see no-one else around me who was having a similar level of encounter with this ‘inner world’. One interpretation of insanity is a complete deviation from the norm – and I felt that is exactly what I was doing. Secondly, possibly either a cause or a consequence of my sense of isolation, was a feeling that I had to work this one out on my own. There was no-one could help me other than myself – and also, possibly, whatever Power it was with whom I was seeking to connect more strongly.

I suppose my profound experience of this Power is what Martin meant when he talked about ‘contact with the deep centre’. That was always there for me. Looking back I believe that, although I was struggling with major emotional and self-esteem issues on a day-to-day basis which appeared to dominate, I was actually spiritually and psychologically relatively secure and well-grounded, and able to handle the challenge of the ‘withdrawal and return’.

As well as journaling, I also began to develop a practice of creating a quiet space, both externally and internally. Over time, my own version of the constructive technique took two forms. I have summarised these as follows.

I learned to withdraw completely into myself, so that I became oblivious of the external world. This was easier to do if I could be in a place that was completely silent. Having withdrawn to that space, I would just stay still, and see what happened. I would not try to control what transpired once I was there. In this respect, I do not tend to call what I do 'meditation', although I would think there are great similarities, and some may call mine a meditative practice. Why do I avoid this term? Probably because, my initial motivation was to access my deeper unconscious, and I was somewhat intuitively trying to find my own way of doing this long before I had any strong awareness of the existence of meditation. Also, in meditation, there are often specific techniques that are used, such as the use of mantras, to completely empty the mind. My aim was not to empty my mind. Indeed, I would often carry my deep concerns and questions with me. However, once I was in that still space, and metaphorically held them in the very different atmosphere that was there, I became much calmer about them – the anxiety began to dissipate – and I would begin to see ways of dealing with them.

This may have been my own mind working better in a stress-free environment, but it felt more than that. Rather, I could feel a great loving power both expanding and embracing me, and sending an energy through me that I did not recognise as being part of my normal daily existence. This, indeed, I perceived as being my experience of William James' MORE – with a sense of it being a power that was, at one and the same time, immanent and transcendent – me, but more than me, both at the same time.

The second technique was to develop my practice of journaling. I encouraged myself to write spontaneously in 'free-flow' style – in other words, I would attempt to open to my deepest unconscious, and see what arose. Again, as in reflection, I would withdraw into myself, finding myself largely oblivious to what was going on in the external environment. Often, I would write pages, having no direct consciousness of what I was writing. Afterwards, there would always be a huge feeling of having externalised thoughts and feelings that otherwise would have lain dormant, and hence unknown. At the end of a writing session, that could often last for over an hour, I would sometimes read over what I had written, and find myself saying: "so that was what was going on for me". The learning for me in terms of what the key issues were in my life, and what I might be able to do about them, was great.

There was a strong connection between the withdrawal into the 'still space', and the active writing, with often the two being interlaced within the same time-frame. The stillness and reflection allowed me to go deep into my interior world; the writing enabled me to externalise what I found there, and have it available to my conscious self.

I saw this, even at that time, to be developing a form of action research – a cyclical process of action and reflection- with the reflection taking place during the time of withdrawal, and the action being played out in the 'return'. I grew to enjoy the 'withdrawal'. I felt as though I were entering into some form of trance, which had a

qualitative dimension that was reassuring and supportive. I could understand Martin when he said:

The most obvious peril of the inward journey is of being swallowed up by the unconscious. The insidious form, the gradual engulfment, the almost imperceptible going over to the unconscious, is a situation (that is) frequently encountered. Everyone who makes the experiment is likely to feel at times, perhaps repeatedly, the subtle fascination of the inner world, drawing him to it. To make the withdrawal and never to make the return is a standing danger of the inward journey. (ibid: 208)

Fortunately for me, my motivation for entering into the ‘experiment in depth’ was to find ways of living more effectively in the external world. Consequently, there was no temptation not to return. However, what I did regularly experience was a tremendous disorientation when I re-engaged with other people and places. It was as though I was returning to a very different country, which was far more noisy, jarring and fragmented in nature. During my time of withdrawal, I felt part of a unity. Back in ‘real time’, I encountered again the challenge of feeling separate and unconnected from much of what I was encountering. Experientially, I really did feel I was living in ‘two worlds’.

In the early stages particularly, I felt that the process of reflection and journaling acted more as an emotional therapy, than as a form of spiritual development. I did explore my relationship with the ‘power’ I experienced – but I was more concerned with issues and relationships I was encountering in the course of my daily life. I was seeking to find a way out of the depression that had started during my time working in the children’s home; and to find my way back to a place of knowledge and strength where I had more to offer young people in the care system.

Verbatim extracts from the journal written at the age of twenty in 1973, during the first weeks immediately following my reading of *The Experiment in Depth*, may give a flavour of the range of moods I experienced during this short space in time.

8th April 1973

I have yesterday and today been reading P.W. Martin’s ‘Experiment in Depth’. All I can say is that it has given me the courage of my convictions – and perhaps has given some guidelines. Much more at the moment I will not say. Rationalisations and reasons I will perhaps give later. For the moment, there are more important things for me to do. For I am going to try to give myself completely over to my ‘unconscious’. I think I have done so partly before, but have not had proper results, because I have not had the courage to let myself go completely. I have been scared that it may be part madness that induced me to write some of the things I may write so I have held back. But, as I say, this book has given me the courage to continue. For it has shown me that everything I have searched for may be found in this way.

14th April 1973

This depth psychology bit is, at the moment, getting me down. I don't quite know where I am. It's not something I'm dabbling in, it's something that's got complete hold of me. And I've got to see it through. This is what worries me. How am I going to do it? What have I got to face? I could easily give it up. I'd love to not have to do it, to find out it's completely unnecessary. But I know it is. This world is full of questions, mystery, misery. Questions to be answered - mysteries to be solved - miseries to be alleviated. Not that I can work wonders - I realise all I can do is do my best in my own particular sphere of life. But how to find out how to do my best? "To thine own self be true" - but there are times when I think I am, and I'm not, I'm sure. How to know for certain?

8th May 1973

I must write - this gets stranger and stranger! The amount of good this writing is doing is absolutely incredible. How can I begin to explain what is happening, what I am finding out?

I can't explain why it is happening, I only know it is. Let anyone tell me it's psychological - what rubbish! No psychological powers alone could achieve the changes in me that I am experiencing. It is certainly something far more strange and mysterious than that. I will find out more about it.

11th May 1973

It's coming as quite a revelation to me to realise that it is within my own power to make what I will of myself. Not that I could do it myself in the least degree. That there is a power beyond and without myself, I am absolutely certain of - the awareness of this is with me all the time now. I depend a lot on this Being - and it is only being in constant communication with this Being that I can go on and progress. I don't think words can express clearly enough at the moment yet what I mean. I will make one attempt. It is up to me completely to do what I can with myself. But I cannot do it by myself. There seems to be an extension of myself somewhere that, somehow in some way, can 'achieve', but only by somehow always calling on that extension, reaching for it. But it is not just within myself, it is something far too distant for that. I as I am now have no idea what it is. But if I try to keep myself as completely open as I can, there is space for this 'extension' to work through me, and in so doing, I get further to becoming that extension.

That does not describe adequately what I mean. I am only trying to explore my own thoughts to see what I mean. Only in so exploring, expressing, will I discover what is 'wrong' about it, and perhaps be able to do better. If anyone else were to read this, it would probably sound absolute rubbish, nonsense!

While I was writing the above, the image of climbing a rope was with me. Starting at the bottom of the rope. As you climb, the part of the rope that you are holding is in a way part of you, that is joined to you, although at the same time is completely separate. The climb up the rope is hard, the higher you get, the harder. The rope is that extension – by it you can reach what it is attached to. The thing it is attached to supports the whole of the rope, and therefore you. This thing is so vast and unknown; although it holds the rope, it is a completely different thing from it – the rope climber has no way of knowing what its nature is; she only knows it must be there because the rope stays put. If the rope climber does not continue climbing, she will not go further up that 'extension' of herself, and so will never reach the top.

The human part of me is the rope climber, I think. The rope is the deep 'inner' part of me which is somehow the link between me and the 'other'. I (the human part) progress towards this other part – this other part is always there, but I have got to make the effort to reach it. Only I can make the effort to climb – but without the rope, and without the thing at the top – both of these are absolutely necessary even if they are not literally 'part' of me.

Slowly and steadily up the rope is best. Too much hurrying – I have to stop after a bit. But too many stops for too long won't get me anywhere! So it is as fast as possible without going too fast – and taking time to look around me as I go!

The analogy is not ideal, and has gone far enough for now. I am trying to find a way of finding an example of something in the physical world that reflects what is going on in the mental sphere. Is it possible?

12th May 1973

I am coming near to the end of this notebook. I've just realised that my next diary will probably take a different form to this one, just as my previous ones have been different. For this has been very much pre-occupied with me as a person, with my relationships, and with that feeling that there's something, I know not what. Well, my own confidence in what I'm doing is growing. I seem to have gone right down to the basics, and come back to be a more whole integrated person. I don't think I've made it quite yet – but it's coming. So what will the next book contain then? As far as I can see and feel at the moment, it will be a 'broadening out' of my personality. O.K so I may be becoming more 'integrated' now, and I may be aware of where I am much more, but that is not enough

The value of journaling grew; it continued to make a qualitative difference to my life. I was fascinated by the process; what exactly was going on? In searching for some explanation, I encountered Ira Progoff's book, *At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability*, which explores the role and significance of journaling, and gives a wide range of journaling techniques.

As well as learning about Progoff's approaches to journaling, I was particularly interested in how he came to feel it to be a valuable process. I found the experience he recounts touched again in me the belief that we are connected to depths far beyond our present ability to consciously understand – and that we would be wise to pay them more attention.

When I returned to civilian life after my army service in World War 2, ...I found myself especially reflecting on the massive burning of books that had taken place during the Hitler era. Again and again I asked myself what would have happened to civilisation if the ritual Nazi burning of the books had been continued until all the recorded wisdom of humankind had been destroyed (including) ...its sacred scriptures. ...Finally .. the answer was given to me ...We would, the voice said, simply draw new spiritual scriptures from the same great source out of which the old ones came. In that moment I became aware of how vast and self-replenishing are the resources of the human spirit. ...That understanding opened a new range of hope for me. Humankind would not be destroyed. No matter what foolish, destructive acts people would perpetrate on the physical level, new fountains of life would continue to rise from reservoirs deep within. Recognising that there are indeed infinite dimensions to our universe, the immortality of life began to be a fact for me.

Soon another realisation arose in me. If mankind has the power to draw additional spiritual scriptures out of the depth of itself, why do we have to wait for a tyrant to burn our Bibles before we let ourselves create further expressions of the spirit? If it is indeed true that each human soul contains a Bible within itself, may it not be that each person contains the possibility of new spiritual events and awarenesses taking place in his and her own experience? Perhaps there are new Bibles, many new Bibles, to be created as the sign of spiritual unfoldment among many persona in the modern era. It

may indeed be that the creation of multiple spiritual scriptures, and especially the extension of old scriptures, is an event that needs to happen in our time as part of the further qualitative evolution of our species. (1975: 2-3)

Influenced generally by depth psychology, and by Carl Jung specifically, Progoff had developed a practice called 'process meditation', which relates to my experience of journaling. The following extract from his writing reflects and summarises aspects of my experience.

Process meditation deepens the level of experience, and this draws an individual into contact with the profound sources of inner wisdom. Many persons have found that as they involved themselves in the (journaling) process to resolve the immediate problems of personal life, they have inadvertently opened awarenesses that are transpersonal in scope. Without intending it, they find that they are drawn beyond themselves in wisdom to levels of experience that have the qualities of poetry and spirit.

..An inner dynamic is built, and this dynamic moves in two directions. One is outward toward the activities of the world. The other is inward. Both are integral to the process as a whole, but it is by the progressive and cumulative deepening of the inward movement that the new energy is built. ..The process of the method draws you systematically inward until it establishes an atmosphere of quietness and depth in which the refocusing and then the reintegration of the life can take place.

It is apparent that this inward movement has an inherently meditative quality. ..People (would) comment that the feelings stirred in them reminded them of profound prayer or deep meditation. And yet they also observed that the process was dealing factually with the (specifics) of their lives, and that it was not prescribing for them any particular religious philosophy.

(Journaling) is indeed a type of prayer and meditation, but not in isolation from life and not in place of active life involvement. Rather, it is meditation in the midst of the reality of our life experiences. It draws upon the actualities of life for new awarenesses, and it feeds these back into the movement of each life as a whole. The fact is that the fundamental process in Process Meditation is each life itself.

At the surface of our life we are conscious of the many pressing problems that beset us, the conflicts, the anxieties, the angers, the decisions that we feel we must urgently make. But one reason that (journaling) has been effective for many people is that it practises an indirect approach to solving our life problems. Rather than move head-on to encounter problems in the external form in which they appear in our lives, we step back and move inward to meet them at a deeper level.

We move deeper and deeper to explore the contents and resources of our life. The purpose and style of that exploration is neither to diagnose nor to judge, but to enable our life to disclose to us what its meanings are. In doing this, we each find different meanings, different directions for our lives. But we discover that, regardless of the diverse conclusions we may reach, we are all impressed by the quality of experience that comes to us as individuals when our attention is focused inwardly in this way, especially when our inwardness has established an atmosphere of depth and stillness of being. The atmosphere

of inward attention seems to possess a profound validity that dwarfs any particular opinions, or any particular anxieties we may hold about the details of our existence.

When our attention is focused inwardly at the depth of our being in the context of the wholeness of our life, resources for a profound knowledge of life become accessible to us.

Process Meditation enables us to work actively and systematically at this inner level, reaching toward an experience both of personal meaning and of a meaning in life that is more than personal. The practice of Process Meditation makes it possible to work tangibly with the dimension of spiritual meaning in the specifics of our individual life history. It also provides an integrative method by which the psychological and the spiritual can be experienced as two sides of a single coin. It may be that all psychological work has been implicitly seeking this ever since William James and C.G Jung recognised that there is no lasting personal healing without an experience of meaning at the depth of one's being. (ibid: 8-10)

Progoff's writing provided additional support for my hypothesis that "there was a level of life to which I did not have immediate access in daily living, but that if I were able to reach it, whatever existed there would help me considerably in improving the quality of my life". In light of my reading and my own experience, I had developed the hypothesis, and was framing it in a slightly different way, in that I was "living as though there were more to life than met the eye, and there was a deeper spiritual reality whose guidance I could trust, which would help me find the meaning I was searching for".

In the next chapter, I describe what was going on in my external life as I continued to live my life based on this as a hypothesis.

Chapter 4

Watershed

Practising Toynbee's notion of withdrawal and return, through entering into a place of inner stillness, and journaling from that place, was one way of knowing that I practised and developed over time. This worked well for me; my spiritual and psychological well-being appeared to flourish as a consequence. Martin had suggested that this was a means by which a successful relationship could be developed between religion and science, where the experience was religious in nature, and the scientific method was used as a means of systematically studying and developing the experience. I had accepted this in principle. But in mainstream society, in the culture I had been brought up, science and religion were seen as two very different ways of knowing. Some would maintain they were mutually exclusive.

For many years in my twenties and thirties, although continuing the practice, and in general accepting my inner intuitive knowing as primary, I was aware that I was still influenced in different ways by both scientific and religious world views.

However, I did not pay much attention to this, and the uncertainty it could create. My professional and personal lives were progressing relatively smoothly, able to sustain the low-key conflict in epistemologies.

Journaling was playing an invaluable role in my emotional and spiritual development; journeying to the deeper parts of myself yielded a form of awareness and knowledge that I do not believe I could have gained from any other source. However, I was also learning a considerable amount in other contexts. Six months after reading an *Experiment in Depth*, and having by now established a regular journaling practice, I started at University.

At that stage, I still believed that the knowledge I was seeking in relation to my professional work did exist somewhere in the external world, and all I needed was the opportunity to gain it. I was asking: "What can I do to better help those children in pain?" I was asking: "Can there be meaning and purpose in a world where such pain and suffering is possible?" And I was asking: "How do I develop a method of knowing that helps me contribute to creating a better world for us all?"

I am sure I did not articulate those questions as clearly or concisely at that point in time. But in a rather jumbled, intense kind of way, those were the issues that were troubling me. The big metaphysical questions jostled alongside the more pragmatic ones that arose out of my daily living.

I had chosen subjects that were as likely as any to give me answers to such questions. The University College of North Wales, Bangor, where I studied, permitted students to follow three subjects for one year, two subjects for two years, and specialise in one main subject in the final year. My chosen specialism was social work; and so I had three full years to develop a greater understanding of the causes, symptoms and effective responses to problems that affect the human condition, and create suffering. My studies in the social sciences gave me an enhanced awareness of both the psychological and social factors that influence the life chances of individuals and communities. However, although I acquired useful information, my greatest learning was the realisation of the high levels of ignorance that still exist in the world; not least of which is the ignorance of the root causes as to why some people inflict enormous damage on others, and what can be done to prevent this happening.

I studied philosophy for two years, with the aim of gaining some useful responses to issues concerning meaning and purpose; and again, realised how many dead ends there were when individuals attempted to answer core life questions. My experience of philosophy was that it created an intellectual talking shop, rather than a guide to wise, practical action in the real world. I finally decided that philosophy was not going to provide me with a means to acquire the knowledge I was seeking. This conclusion was reached after I had spent 3 hours in a small group in serious discussion about how, in looking at the table in front of us, we could guarantee that although each of us said it was 'brown' and 'rectangular', we were all actually seeing the same colour and the same shape. Did we all, perhaps, have different visual perceptions, despite using the same labels? Up to a point, I found the debate engaging – but I find completing difficult cryptic crosswords engaging. Neither activity offered a constructive response to the fundamental questions I was asking in regard to purpose and meaning, pain and suffering.

The greatest revelation I experienced whilst at university was during my one year involvement in 'Study of Religions'. Through my reading of Martin, I had decided that perhaps I needed to be more open in my approach to religion, which was my main reason for choosing this subsidiary subject. What I had not expected was its level of impact on me. I remember walking out of the early sessions, feeling as though my mind had been blown wide open, and experiencing a sense of complete disorientation.

I discovered that religion included many more options, and ways of perceiving myself and the world, than I had been taught in the conventional Christian Church. Judaism and Islam were also monotheistic religions; but viewed different historical events and individuals as having significance. The Eastern religions and philosophies, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, taught a different form of perception altogether. They saw a much closer unity between the material and spiritual world, where individuals were part of a larger whole in which they influenced their own destiny; they were not subject to the critical judgement of a separate and all-powerful 'God'.

I discovered that issues of pain and suffering were fundamental to Buddhist philosophy, and gave an explanation for its existence that I could relate to. A central notion was that of *dukkha*, meaning pain that seeps at some level into all finite existence.

Life (in the condition it has got itself into) is dislocated. Something has gone wrong. It is out of joint. As its pivot is not true, friction (interpersonal conflict) is excessive, movement (creativity) is blocked, and it hurts.

...Somehow life has become estranged from reality, and this estrangement precludes real happiness until it is overcome. (Smith 1991: 101 – 102)

The main question for me was: “Is it possible for life to be any different? Is there anything we can do, individually and collectively, to overcome the suffering?”

Again, my response was in accord with Huston’s summary of the Buddhist perspective:

The Buddha’s philosophy was not pessimistic. A report of the human scene can be as grim as one pleases; the question of pessimism does not arise until we are told whether it can be improved. Because the Buddha was certain that it could be, his outlook falls within Heinrich Zimmer’s observation that “everything in Indian thought supports the basic insight that, fundamentally, all is well. A supreme optimism prevails everywhere”. But the Buddha saw clearly that life as typically lived is unfulfilling and filled with insecurity.

He did not doubt that it is possible to have a good time and that having a good time is enjoyable, but two questions obtruded. First, how much of life is thus enjoyable. And second, at what level of our being does such enjoyment proceed. Buddha thought the level was superficial, sufficient perhaps for animals but leaving deep regions of the human psyche empty and wanting. By this understanding even pleasure is gilded pain. “Earth’s sweetest joy is but disguised pain,” William Drummond wrote, while Shelley speaks of “that unrest which men miscall delight.” Beneath the neon dazzle is darkness; at the core – not of reality, but of unregenerated human life – is the “quiet desperation” Thoreau saw in most peoples’ lives. That is why we seek distractions, for distractions divert us from what lies beneath the surface. Some may be able to distract themselves for long periods, but the darkness is unrelieved. (ibid: 99-100)

Experiencing the restlessness and the ‘quiet desperation’ in myself, and seeing the extent of pain and suffering in the world around me – but also having a strong intuitive sense that there **were** grounds for optimism, that it was possible for things to be different, led me into my next question. What could I do to help heal the dislocation?

The other aspect of Study of Religions that made an impact on me were sessions on ‘Modern Interpretations of Christianity’. Even in the religion in which I had been brought up, there were alternative perspectives. ‘Christianity’ was not just a dogma-driven institutionalised belief system. Thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin challenged the idea of a dualistic world view, and instead saw the world more as a unity, in a spiritual as well as a physical evolutionary process. During these sessions I began to reflect for the first time on the possibility that I was participating in an ‘evolution of consciousness’; an idea that was to grow and flourish in the years ahead.

Through Study of Religions, it was confirmed to me that there was more to religion than I had realised; and that to reject it completely was possibly throwing the baby out with the bath water. However, although it offered a massive arena to explore, it was clear that I was not going to find ready made answers to my questions in any one religion.

Each of them claimed to teach ‘truths’; but unless I explored these, and tested them out against my own life experience, what reliable grounds would I have for accepting one rather than the other? I intuitively felt what I later read in Heron:

If you claim that spiritual authority resides in some other person, being, doctrine, book, school or church, you are the legitimating author of this claim. You choose to regard it as valid. No authority resides in anything external unless you first decide to confer that authority on it. (1998: 34)

I could see no reason for conferring authority on a single belief system; hence I chose to stay open to the wisdom and learning that might be available in each, but did not attach myself to any specific one.

University was a rich experience, despite the fact that it did not supply me with all the answers I was seeking. As a means of gaining experience in a different way, I travelled the world for a year, visiting India, Thailand and Indonesia. During this time, I met practising Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs, and learned about these faiths from a different perspective. The diverse cultures, including the varying approaches and representations of an assumed spiritual reality, were fascinating. But despite these differences, what I learned was how much in common there was between different races and cultures. We live on the same planet, with all the ultimate existential dilemmas that that brings. I came to believe passionately that if we were to make much progress in terms of gaining knowledge about what it means to be human, we needed to learn to do that collaboratively, getting rid of all the artificial and destructive boundaries that obstruct the development of harmonious relationships.

On my return, I completed my professional training as a social worker. As part of my course, I had an extended placement at an adolescent unit for young people who had experienced abuse. My supervisor there, Jerry, who had started the unit, was an excellent role model in terms of relating to, and working with, young people. I gained a considerable amount from that placement. It was also the beginning of a productive working relationship with Jerry, and on several occasions during the next few years, we would work collaboratively, though not particularly closely, on a number of cases.

I spent several years in residential social work, gaining promotion, and being given responsibility for staff development in a new Barnardo’s project. I enjoyed being responsible for other people’s learning and development, and it gave me real pleasure to see people’s practice develop; but despite that, I felt very frustrated at what was being achieved. I could not get away from the fact that we did not know enough to really help these young people; we were simply dealing with superficial symptoms.

Following my interest in education, I became a college lecturer, teaching on a professional social work course, and on management courses. However, after four years, I was becoming depressed by the bureaucracy, and by the narrowness of the training materials. I wanted to expand what I was doing, both intellectually and in terms of the role I was playing. With some uncertainty and trepidation, I became self employed.

Since leaving University, I had been continuing to journal to a greater or lesser extent – with continuing changes in my inner and outer life. There was no doubt that the

learning I gained through accessing my unconscious enabled me to make tremendous shifts in my attitudes and behaviour in the outside world. Although I went through psychologically difficult times during my twenties, I never needed to go into formal therapy. However, the quality of my external life improved considerably. My confidence grew slowly but steadily and substantially. I developed more and generally better relationships. The compulsion towards various forms of addictive behaviours that I found at one time so difficult to control gradually eased, and eventually disappeared. I grew more assured and influential in work contexts, playing an increasingly stronger leadership role. I came to feel, as well as to be seen as, a 'well-adjusted and grounded person'.

It was largely because of the strength I gained from this process that I was able to acquire the courage to leave secure employment. It was far from risk free; mortgage payments depended on me receiving a regular income. However, it was as though I had been opened up to so many possibilities internally, I had to make changes externally. Within my own life experience, there was great evidence of Jung's claim that, through using the constructive technique, "people would develop new energies and insights, and generally experience a dynamic renewal of life". (Jung 1965/1991: 9)

There came a point when I was so 'at ease' in the external world that it would seem that the reflective times, and the desire to write, would no longer need to be there. But in fact, this was not the case. It was as though I had made contact with some energy that had become vital to my continued well-being. Experientially, I felt that in these times, I was connecting to the creative life-source of my existence, in a way that was as necessary to me as water and oxygen. In addition, I consistently felt that it gave me the courage to do things I would otherwise not do.

Shortly after my 30th birthday, my daughter Rachel was born. My marriage was comfortable, without conflict, but increasingly dissatisfying. Rachel's father and I were both developing in different directions, and in the latter years, apart from planned holidays and social events, we hardly saw each other. We had spoken about what was happening, and had decided that, on a day-to-day basis, we would follow our own lives, but that, as we co-existed together quite happily, there was no reason to split up. If anything happened for either of us that made us want to review that decision, we would do so.

As I lived my external life, I continued to 'act as if' there were *more to life than met the eye, and that there existed a deeper spiritual energy whose guidance I could trust, which would help me find the meaning I was searching for*. This certainly held the status of a 'provisional working hypothesis' for me, for despite what I subjectively considered to be extensive experiential evidence of a wider reality of this nature, I was not confident enough to say I 'knew'. I could not rationally exclude the possibility that there was no more to life than I experienced with my five senses; that what I experienced as connection with a wider reality was in fact a delusion created by the neurons in my brain. I knew that I was still incredibly ignorant. Despite my search for knowledge to help young people in pain, during the process of which I had become a successful professional within social work practice and education, I had found no real answers. So, my life was a compromise. I followed my perceived 'inner voice' and intuition; but allowed my belief in this to co-exist with the possibility that in so doing, I was being seduced by an illusion.

My response to the question concerning whether it was safe to trust my intuition fluctuated depending on how I was experiencing the world at the time. For a large part of my life, I had been aware of three very different ways of perceiving the world, with each seeming to have strong arguments in their support. My attitudes, behaviour and approach to life had at times been more influenced by the one, and at times the other. The consequence had been a continuing though not always conscious confusion. It is only in recent years that I have been able to clearly understand and articulate the basis of the confusion.

The first of these world views reflects what I would term a “rational, materialistic, scientific” perspective. In its extreme form, this is where all forms of life are seen to have their origins in a set of chance circumstances. There is no reality beyond the physical universe; what we perceive with our five senses is all that exists. Individual identity starts with birth and ends with death. Consciousness is an emergent property of the brain – when the brain goes, consciousness goes.

A second world view that has been dominant in our society over many centuries is the dualist religious perspective. In this context, there is the physical world, which contains living creatures and various forms of nature; and beyond that, a transcendent God Who exists separate from the physical world, but Who has the means and the power to judge and control us. Having been brought up in a committed Christian context, I had absorbed notions of inevitable sinfulness and consequent guilt. Although I had rejected these on a rational level, I could relate to Deikman, when he says:

I have found that almost everyone, including myself, has a background fantasy of some celestial entity that is watching, keeping track of what we do, keeping accounts for a final settling-up after we die.” (Deikman in Hart et.al. 2000: 313)

The third option I became aware of challenges the dualist religious view, but believes that there is a reality which is much wider than our five senses indicate. All that exists is held within a unity, where separation and isolation are but an illusion. Life on earth is an integral part of a much greater energy source – and as such has a potential which can be realised in ways yet unrecognised and unarticulated by the human brain. Intuition, an inner intangible sense of ‘knowing’, is one means by which awareness and wisdom contained within that reality is communicated.

A factor that supported my sense of there being something ‘more’ was my continuing experience of synchronicities – that is, events which are statistically unlikely to have happened by chance. For as long as I could remember, events had happened to me that seemed to defy the explanation of ‘chance co-incidence’.

I had become aware of the concept of synchronicity when reading Carl Jung’s autobiography (1965/1991). Jung writes of an incident which influenced him greatly. A young woman was having a therapy session with him, and was telling him of a dream she had had the previous night in which she had been given a golden scarab. As she was talking, Jung heard a tapping noise on the window behind him. He got up and opened the window, at which a scarab beetle flew in. Scarab beetles were not common in that part of the world, which meant its appearance was particularly startling. The

experience made an impact on the young woman, who made rapid progress in her therapy as a consequence.

Jung defined synchronicity as a meaningful coincidence of a psychic and a physical state or event which have no causal relationship to each other. It may be an inwardly perceived event, such as a thought, dream or premonition which is seen to have a correspondence in external reality; that is, the inner image 'comes true'. An example that many people can relate to is a time when they were thinking of someone they had not spoken to for a long time – then the phone rings, and it is the person they were thinking of.

Many people have given numerous examples of synchronous experiences in their lives (e.g. Mansfield 1995; Jaworski 1996, Moolenburgh 1998). To identify what kind of experience I am talking about, I will give two examples of my own, which I hope illustrate clearly the level of 'co-incidence' that occurs.

When my daughter, Rachel, was about six years of age, we arranged to go on holiday to France with friends who had two young children. We had a four-berth caravan, and tent that slept six. The friends were to borrow our tent. As we lived in the Midlands, and they were travelling from Dorset, we arranged to meet them at the port, prior to taking the boat over the channel.

We drove down overnight, and stopped in a lay-by for an early morning breakfast. The tent was in the caravan, and as was our custom, we took it out, and put it under the caravan to give us room inside. Whilst eating, a minibus pulled up behind us. I realised that my daughter was paying them a lot of attention out of the window, and saw that one of them was relieving himself close to our van. I closed the curtains, telling Rachel to get on with her breakfast. When we had finished, we went to fetch the tent - to find it had gone. The young men had apparently not only relieved themselves, but had relieved us of our belongings! This put us in a fairly dreadful situation. Our friends were dependent on us for their accommodation. We were none of us well off in those days, and could not afford to either buy another tent, nor pay for alternative accommodation. The caravan was hardly big enough for us, far less sleep four additional people.

At our wits end, we decided we might as well go to the campsite we were booked onto, as there seemed no better alternative. When we reached there, I asked the person at reception whether she knew of anywhere we could hire a tent very cheaply, as ours had just been stolen. The woman gave us a strange look, and said we were in luck. A family had left the day before, and had given her their tent prior to leaving. Apparently they were to buy a new tent for their next holiday, and would have no use for their old one. They thought she might be able to find someone who would have use for it. The woman had not had this happen to her before, and wasn't quite sure what to do with it - so when we turned up, she was glad to have it taken. That was coincidental enough - but the real shock came when we saw the tent. Ours was about twenty years old, blue and orange with two sleeping compartments, good quality but well worn with two or three tears in different places. This tent was virtually identical - same age, colour, size, condition - to all intents and purposes, the same tent. It wasn't - the tears were in different places. But if you didn't know the other tent as we did, and put the two together, you couldn't have told the difference. We were staggered.

I remember vividly thinking that if I had doubted there being a Power that lay behind our daily experience, I should not do so again. The whole thing just seemed to go far beyond the bounds of meaningless coincidence.

A further experience is also one that appeared to go beyond the bounds of co-incidence. I was travelling to the south coast – and on the way, I stayed over with friends who lived in Marlborough. I arrived, had a pleasant evening, then left the following morning. A few days later, I was at home, and about to go out. I was wearing beige trousers and a tee-shirt. It was a pleasant summer day, but it looked as if it might be a bit chilly – and I thought perhaps I should wear something a bit warmer. I do not have many beige clothes – but I had a cream-coloured cardigan that would match nicely. I was on my way out of the lounge, about to go upstairs, when the door-bell rang. I opened the door, to find it was the postman, who handed me a small parcel. I opened the parcel – and inside was the cream-coloured cardigan I was on the point of fetching. There was also a letter enclosed from my friend, saying I had left the cardigan behind, and she was sending it on, as she thought I might need it. Needless to say, I was taken aback. It doesn't matter how often synchronicities occur, they always evoke in me a sense of wonder!! I wouldn't have remembered that I had taken that particular top away with me, far less realised that I had left it at my friends. Had the door bell not rung at that second, I would have gone upstairs, been puzzled that it was not in the wardrobe where I expected it to be, and would have searched the house – in vain, as it would now seem.

But what was the significance of that event? I thought about it – and in itself, it seemed to be totally meaningless. Not a life-changing occurrence – but the probability of that cardigan arriving at the exact time I thought of it and went to fetch it – given that it was not one of my most often used pieces of clothing – seemed incredible.

Occurrences of this nature have happened so often that I was stimulated to consider in more depth what explanation there might be for synchronous events. I came to realise that they only presented a difficulty for me, because I have been raised in a culture that promotes the view that every event has to have a cause, and the cause must precede the effect. However, not all cultures perceive things in this way. Many have never seen the principle of causality as underlying all reality. It seems that the law of causality only operates if we view the world in one particular way, and with a specific mindset. Change the view and the mindset, and a different set of events appear to happen altogether.

The relationship between the physical and the psychic

Carl Jung asked how, in a world supposedly governed by the law of causality, could there be phenomena which so clearly violated that law? His answer was to doubt, not the veracity of the phenomena, but the universal validity of the law. Causality is only one principle. If the law of causality couldn't accommodate the existence of certain facts associated with the workings of the mind, among them telepathy and precognition, then that law must rest on a distorted or, at best, partial view of reality and was itself in need of some rethinking.

Jung was encouraged to pursue this stance by new developments in 20th century physics. He knew Einstein's relativity theory had challenged all old notions of space and time which were part of the causal framework, and that the unpredictable events described by quantum physics seemed more relevant to understanding the mechanics of the psyche. If the universe were to be understood fully, this task would be achieved by both physics and psychology transcending their own disciplinary limitations and moving forward together with shared insights.

He developed an alliance with Wolfgang Pauli, the Nobel prize-winning quantum physicist, who also believed there was a reality lying beyond that which could be explained by cause and effect. Parapsychology was seen to act as a natural bridge between physics and psychology; and Pauli hoped that in working with Jung he might find a way to express on the larger scale everyday level of reality some natural extension of the very small scale, quantum mechanical phenomena he had helped to discover.

Jung and Pauli supported the view that there is an absolute spaceless, timeless cosmos in which both the psyche and the material universe are manifest. Pauli argued that this cosmos has an order of its own, independent of human will, human perceptual categories or our supposed laws of causality. Within this viewpoint, all accepted boundaries between the knower and the known break down, and mind and matter come to be seen as extensions of each other.

Jung called this somewhat mystical absolute 'transpsychic reality', and argued that, in a realm beyond our conscious psyche with its divisions between mind and matter and its causal perceptions manifested in space and time, there is a timeless unity in which past, present and future merge, and where matter and the psyche are but alternative manifestations of a single reality.

Despite the fact that Jung's research was highly scientific, reinforced with countless examples from his many case histories, and his ideas were espoused and followed up by Arthur Koestler in *The Roots of Coincidence* (1972), few scientists took him seriously. They could not envisage a world that was not based on the precise laws of causality.

However, not all cultures are based on the causality principle. For example, traditional Chinese thinking incorporates the idea that 'chance' or 'coincidence' has significant meaning in our lives. Whatever happens in a particular moment inevitably possesses the qualities peculiar to that moment. The I Ching is an oracle developed out of this way of seeing the world. By throwing either yarrow sticks or coins, it is seen that, at the exact moment when the position of the yarrow sticks or coins is determined, there is not just a coincidence of events in space and time, but there is a qualitative relationship between the external physical event, and internal psychic experiences of the observer of the event. There is seen to be a peculiar interdependence of objective events with the subjective state of the observer.

The consequences arising out of the conflict between different ways of seeing the world are profound. C.P. Snow was conscious of this; he suggested that we have a deep underlying confusion about everything, because, unlike most stable societies, we do not have a consensus world view. Rather, there exists one that is dominant in the humanities and religions, where values are seen to be significant, and such things as free

will and the human spirit are seen to be ‘real’; and the scientific world view, where they are not. (Snow: 1960)

Both the learning I gained through journaling and the occurrence of synchronicities, gave support for my sense that there was a way of understanding reality that lay beyond those provided by either religion or conventional science, and presented a challenge to both those perspectives; but I still remained remarkably ignorant as to the possible nature of reality; and what methods of research could help me learn more.

I continued to be challenged by different interpretations of reality. However, despite the conflict that existed in my mind, the influence of my intuition was sufficiently strong to encourage me to refute all rational arguments. This enabled me to take the risk, and give up secure employment to start my own business. Soon after doing so, I was asked to do consultancy work for Staffordshire Social Services Department after the ‘scandal’ that hit their residential children’s homes resulted in the much publicised ‘pindown’ report. Because the work was to involve in-depth contact with both young people and staff, I wanted someone to work with me. I asked Jerry, who had been my social work supervisor so many years previously and with whom I had since worked on a number of occasions; he was the person I most respected in this field. Within a short period of time, it was clear that there was a whole personal dimension to our relationship that was going to explode unless we took deliberate steps to stop it. So I made my second major decision: to bring my marriage to an end. My hesitation was that I would be threatening Rachel’s security. However, I trusted the situation enough to feel that she would be fine.

At this point, can I say that by that time I was certain there was deep meaning to life; that my intuition was pointing me in a direction that was valid; that my hypothesis that *there was more to life than met the eye, and there existed a deeper spiritual energy whose guidance I could trust, which would help me find the meaning I was searching for* had been proven? No. The most I can say is that I continued to live ‘as if’ the hypothesis were true, and that it was a very real and likely possibility. However, a number of competing theories jostled for a place in my mind. I never seemed able to completely rid myself of the fear that, at any moment, life could fall apart at the seams, and show me that my sense of a ‘wise intuition’, and all the learning I had gained, had been ill-founded.

Then, a momentous event occurred, which challenged me to the very core of my being.

Chapter 5

A Transformative Crisis

My partner's death created a major existential crisis for me, forcing me to re-think what it was feasible to know, engage in major re-questioning about what purpose and meaning there could possibly be to life in such circumstances, and re-visit the role and significance of suffering. It also opened me up to an experience which was to become important to me: a sense of spiritual resilience, emerging from a continuing and sustaining experience of an intangible, but loving and dynamic energy.

The details of the months after deciding to live with Jerry are not so relevant here. Suffice to say that my concerns about Rachel were not realised. She developed an enormous closeness to Jerry, and was in no doubt where her future lay. The period of transition itself was of course difficult, and I would not want to underestimate the agonising and high levels of pain that were experienced in many different ways during that time. Fundamental change, however desirable or beneficial the outcomes eventually are, involves loss also, and that has to be acknowledged and grieved for.

However, the worst times seemed to be over. Rachel and I had been living with Jerry in his very small home in Birmingham, but had just bought a house in a rural setting, which had been chosen by the three of us, and represented for us a dream home in a dream location. Because Jerry had not yet sold his house, and we were still using it as a base, the new one was bought in my name, to include Jerry's once he had paid off his other mortgage. We bought the house on 5th July 1994. It was a large one, as both Jerry and I were working independently, and required separate offices. It was in a bad state of repair, and needed considerable work doing on it. Professionally, our quiet period was during the main summer holiday weeks, and we wanted to get the house up to a good standard, including some major building work, before we started back into our busy period in September. We were due to go away on holiday on 23rd July. Rachel's last day in her present school was on 22nd July, after which she was to start a new secondary school. She was tremendously excited by all that was happening. She had put a chart on the wall, numbering and crossing off all the days till the end of the school term, at which point, she was to properly start her 'new life'. She could not wait. With Jerry, I had the kind of complete relationship that I had previously thought only happened in dreams and films, and not in real life. My relationship with Rachel was close and good. And Rachel loved Jerry dearly. I was quietly but deeply happy.

It was the 21st July. I had collected Rachel from school, and we had gone to the new house, where Jerry was managing the work that needed to be done. At that stage, the house was like a building site, but soon the 're-building' process was to start. We bought a Chinese take-away, and sat in the back garden, eating the food and relishing the atmosphere, in a generally peaceful state of mind. I had got most things ready for

the holiday. We left about 7.00p.m., so Rachel could get a decent night's sleep prior to her last day at school. Jerry was to return about 10.00 p.m. after he had completed his current work.

I suspected and sensed nothing. It came to 10.45 p.m. I wondered unconcernedly what had held him up. I phoned the house. The man who had been working with him answered the phone, which I knew was unusual, as he had an aversion to phones. I asked for Jerry. I cannot now remember what was said. All I know is, he had to repeat himself a number of times, in different ways. The message that finally instilled itself was, that about an hour previously, Jerry had had a heart attack, and had died on the spot. The ambulance had been called, and had just taken him away.

I cannot describe the devastation, either for myself or Rachel. The next few months I remember as a blur. Up to Jerry's death, I had been living 'as if' there were validity in the hypothesis that there was meaning and purpose to life. Now the event that could disprove this, and demonstrate that in fact 'life can fall apart at the seams' had happened.

Except - the amazing thing that astonished, and still on one level astonishes me, is that it hadn't! Life never fell apart at the seams. Devastation, grief, agonising pain, anguish - all those things and more. But to my utter surprise, there was always something there that kept it together. On a practical level, there was the support of my family and friends. I had never experienced the death of someone close to me before, and had not fully realised the power of friendship and loving support. I became acquainted with unfamiliar but wonderful qualities in others, who were not necessarily well known to me, but who had themselves suffered major loss. It was as though an intangible but resilient safety net had been brought in that saved me falling to the ground, and prevented me disintegrating into a myriad of pieces.

I felt as though the resilience was not just present in the support of friends. During this intensely painful time, my sense of an intuitive 'inner voice', of a warm loving energy that was ever-present to me, continued, and at such a time of crisis possibly even strengthened. As I despaired and grieved, I wondered at this other quality I was experiencing. In my journaling, I poured onto paper all that was happening to me, internal and external. It provided an enormously important means of responding to the apparent contradictions in what I was feeling; and enabled me to hold onto and retain the connection with that 'deep centre' (Martin: 1955) which had become such an integral part of my life.

A strategy I had had to adopt as a means of surviving the trauma of Jerry's death was to take one moment at a time, as I found I was psychologically incapable of projecting into the future. It was all that I could do to live through the present moment. However, I became increasingly aware that as a result of the 'spiritual resilience' I was experiencing through my felt connection with an intangible 'loving dynamic energy', the present moment could generate tremendous riches. The relationship with Rachel, and with friends, continued to be enormously rewarding. More subtle and unexpected was what was happening in my professional life. If I had been asked in advance what would happen to my work if Jerry were to die, I would have said that I would cease to have an interest in it. We had been collaborating closely on important and interesting work, which for me reflected the quality of what was happening between us personally.

I would have thought that, without Jerry, all of that would have collapsed. But in fact, what was happening continued to develop. Even though in many ways, I felt I was operating somewhat on ‘auto-pilot’, it did not seem to adversely affect the opportunities. After Jerry’s death, I was left with an enormous mortgage, originally calculated to be paid from two people’s incomes, plus substantial debts owing from work done so far on the house. Because we were not married, I was not entitled to any of Jerry’s estate. The house, if sold in its present state, would incur tremendous loss. I was in a financial disaster area. And yet, work evolved in a way that enabled sufficient income to be generated, and indeed gradually eased the financial burden. I both owed and earned money to an extent that had never previously been the case, in a way that for me defies rational explanation.

At a deeper level, something even more significant was happening. People had always commented on how much energy Jerry had. Since his death, I felt time and time again that his energy was with me. Not just that I was ‘remembering’ it, and was so influenced by it - but that in a very real and tangible way, the consciousness that was Jerry’s was there, and was positively aiding me. It was also interesting to observe that I took down photos of Jerry at an early stage. Not a sign that I no longer cared, or that he was no longer part of my life. Rather, looking at them dragged me back into when he was alive, and times past, when I knew I had to live fully in the present, and the ‘future’ would evolve out of how I used this present moment. And as Jerry was in this present moment, I had no need of the photos.

Even as I write that last sentence, I am aware of what people might say - and I have thought it all myself. Wishful thinking, a desire to feel him there means I can create that experience - and I accept all that as a possibility. But ultimately, I have to accept myself as I know I am. I am not given to self-deception - I am too much of a logical rationalist for that. I have never mistaken someone else for him - and have dreamt of him rarely. However, my strong feeling of his presence has reinforced in me the belief that perhaps our experience of consciousness as embodied beings is contained within a wider context which in some way holds the experience of all beings who have preceded us. Perhaps, if we are sufficiently open, we can benefit and use the learning gained from that experience.

As I look back on this experience, I feel I can relate to Mansfield, when, after stating that in Buddhism all experience is an “uninterrupted spiritual experience whatever man has done to degrade it”, he responds to the question: “How can suffering be an uninterrupted spiritual experience?” as follows:

The question needs answering on two levels. First for the unenlightened ego there is only the first Noble Truth – all life is tainted by suffering. At this level the pain and suffering of daily life do not reach beyond themselves to any deeper truth. We suffer like the mouse tortured by my cat – or worse, because, unlike the mouse, we add psychological anguish to suffering. Buddhism and other great traditions offer us respite from suffering, but it’s a brute fact nonetheless. Second, for the adept who truly understands all experience as a revelation of his mind, which in turn is expressing the World Soul, then, and only then, is all experience interruptedly known as spiritual. Most of us find ourselves between these two extremes, perhaps closer to the unenlightened than we like. Without a glimmer of understanding, without some hint of purpose and meaning in experience, our ego never gets beyond the first Noble Truth -

true suffering permeates all life. Occasionally, even in the midst of great suffering, it's revealed that this pain has meaning; that this experience is ultimately instructive, revelatory. Here is an experience of redeeming grace. Of course, the exact meaning or significance for the individual is unique and often difficult to discover. Nevertheless pain is the greatest of spiritual messengers, initiating us into the process of individuation, the beginning of the search for meaning, the foundation for a spiritual life.
(Mansfield 1995: 228-229)

Having experienced the trauma of Jerry's death, the emotional devastation it created for myself and Rachel, and the impetus it gave me to engage more actively with 'spiritual questions', I can truly say that my experience of extreme suffering enables me to support the proposition that "pain is the greatest of spiritual messengers, initiating us into the process of individuation, the beginning of the search for meaning, the foundation for a spiritual life". Witnessing the suffering of young people in the care system, and the pain that it created in me, had started me on a 'search for meaning'. Some of the energy had gone from that search, though; I had reached a point where I was happy with the stage I had reached. Jerry's death was a transformative crisis in my life, which returned me forcefully to a renewed and re-energised search.

Chapter 6

The Scientific & Medical Network

In my search for a way of knowing that would help me gain satisfactory responses to my increasingly urgent questions concerning meaning and purpose, pain and suffering, I discovered an organisation that challenged the materialistic world view, and was exploring the relationship between science, spirituality and intuition. I found that for the first time in my life, I was in the company of other people who were truly open to exploring and rigorously evaluating different ways of knowing.

During the months following Jerry's death, I struggled to survive practically, psychologically, and spiritually. Rachel also suffered tremendously. Not only was she having to manage the loss of Jerry, but she was now living in a new place, with no friends, and having to cope with the demands of a new school. In addition, because we had been in the process of completely renovating the house over the summer, it was not at that point habitable, and we had to live in a small touring caravan in the garden for three months. For a period of time, I felt she was close to some kind of breakdown – and probably I gained strength from knowing I had to support her. After we had finally moved into the house, by which time Rachel had made new friends, she became, if not happy, certainly more settled. At that point, I felt that my sense of 'spiritual resilience' that had been keeping me going through my felt connection with an intangible loving dynamic energy was weakening, and I was close to a breaking point. Questions I had asked myself at earlier stages in my life about the meaning and purpose of life were nothing in relation to the intensity with which I was experiencing those questions now. I could feel I was approaching some kind of spiritual crisis. How, if I accepted the idea of a meaningful universe, was it possible to account for the nature and timing of Jerry's death? Had 'the essence that was him' just disappeared completely with the physical cessation of his body? Was my sense of his presence an illusion, just an aspect of my imagination, with no basis in 'reality'?

About six months after his death, I was at rock bottom. A friend had invited me to join her on a weekend retreat in Herefordshire. I remember driving there on the Friday evening from where I was working in Telford, feeling that my head was going to explode, and wondering if I would actually manage to make my destination.

The location was a large country house, in an isolated position with beautiful views. The first part of the retreat was taken in silence, with group members being free to wander where they wished, read or meditate, but not talk. I remember experiencing these hours as 'manna to the soul'. When eventually talking began, it was gentle and contemplative. I began for the first time in a long while to visibly relax. By the Sunday afternoon, I felt that I may have reached a turning point.

As I was sitting in the lounge, shortly before we left, I was looking through some magazines that lay there. A leaflet fell out of one. It gave information about the Scientific and Medical Network, an organisation about which I had never heard. However, I was interested in what was written. The Network *“aims to deepen understanding in science, medicine and education by fostering both rational analysis and intuitive insights. It questions the assumptions of contemporary scientific and medical thinking, so often limited by exclusively materialistic reasoning. By remaining open to intuitive and spiritual insights, it fosters a climate in which science as a whole can adopt a more comprehensive and sensitive approach.”*

Because I was aware that for so long, I had been living with the ambivalence of conflicting worldviews, including one based on a rational materialist perspective, and another on an intuitive spiritually based one, I found myself attracted to an organisation committed to challenging materialism, and seeking to value both the rational and the intuitive. I decided to find out more.

It seemed that the Network had been started in the 1970's by doctors and scientists who felt that the materialistic basis to their professional training was established within a worldview that did not necessarily reflect reality. One of the founders, George Blaker, talked of:

the possibility that forms of intelligent life exist that are invisible to us and operating in quite a different environment of their own, some of it interpenetrating ours but all of it undetected by our ordinary bodily senses. Such an expansion of the unspoken but compelling assumptions confining human thought would be bound to lead to a new renaissance of human creativity in all directions.

(SMN Paper *Recollections of the Founding of the Network*)

In the same paper, Kelvin Spencer, another of the founders states:

Too many scientists give the impression that they know nearly all that's needed to blaze the way to a better world. Yet compared with what we need to know - certainly how to achieve a world in which war plays no part! - what we know now is little indeed.

I felt such a strong connection to these statements! It seemed to me that these founders were clearly saying there was more to life than most people seemed to acknowledge - and that if we could develop a different kind of understanding, it would lead to creative action that could contribute towards achieving a world that was a more meaningful and peaceful place for all to live in. Presumably, their motive in starting the Network was to explore ways in which this understanding linked to creative action could be put into operation. If that were the case, then I wanted to know more.

I became a member of the Scientific and Medical Network (SMN), a decision that was to have major consequences for the unfolding of my life from that point. My involvement had an immediate effect; it removed a feeling of isolation with which I had become familiar. I realised that I was not on my own in feeling there was something badly lacking in the mindset that dominated the western world. Unexpectedly, I found myself mixing with people from diverse backgrounds who were challenging the positivist mind set that underpinned the training and practice of professional people

within our established social institutions, including the health service, education and social services. I was in a place where I could explore many different ways of seeing things, and engage in free-ranging discussions without fear of rejection. George Blaker summarised the feelings of many people I encountered in the network, when he said that, while struggling on his own, he “wrote a poem about being enclosed in four brown walls”; then when he joined forces with others: “From that moment the brown walls began to lose their rigidity. They could be pushed.”

This did not mean that ‘anything went’. A major principle of the SMN was to be open to any ideas or experiences that people had; but to be discriminating in terms of what was understood to be ‘true’. Issues of rigour and validity were always to the forefront. I experienced an ethos where taking a judgemental approach to each other’s ideas was discouraged; being constructively critical of different views was fine, so long as respect was demonstrated for the person in the process.

In the early stages of my membership of the Network, the element that made greatest impact on me was the learning I gained concerning the implications of modern science, and in particular, quantum physics. I had realised through my reading of Jung and Pauli that the findings of quantum physics were significant in supporting a challenge to the materialist world view; but I had at that stage accepted this as a principle rather than exploring the detail. Now I became interested in learning exactly what information about the world was being revealed by research within quantum physics. From this basis, I became fascinated in the developing area coming broadly under the heading of a ‘science of consciousness’. This seemed to provide a means for me to explore in a more structured way the idea that had fascinated me since the days of reading Teilhard de Chardin (1970) when I was at university: that is, that I was participating in an evolution of consciousness.

My introduction to these areas of enquiry within science provided a gateway which led to me being able to locate the conflict I had experienced for so long (in terms of different ways of seeing the world) within a historical and psychological context. In helping me resolve that conflict, it also enabled me to form a world view that made sense of, and integrated, my internal and external experiences; something I had been trying to achieve for a long time.

This growing awareness took place over several years; and of course in many ways, continues still. What I have chosen to do in the following section is provide an overview of ideas and theories I have absorbed during that time, presented in a logical order that will hopefully communicate clearly. However, I want to emphasise at this stage that the process felt far from orderly at the time of initially internalising them. It often felt messy, confusing, chaotic and disorientating. At the same time as experiencing excitement at what on one level I knew to be so important to me, there were also occasions when I wondered whether I could really take on board the implications of what I was internalising.

My thoughts and experiences concerning the latter come at a later stage in this thesis. In the next chapter, I specifically explore the learning I gained from investigating findings from quantum physics, and the impact this had on me in terms of developing way of knowing which integrated insights from both science and spirituality.

Chapter 7

The Challenge of Quantum Physics within the Western World

As a member of the Scientific and Medical Network, I had many opportunities to hear about recent findings in physics, and consider their implications for how we understood the world in our ways of knowing. I was stunned by what I discovered. I had assumed that the deterministic and law-driven principles underpinning the universe which were discovered through scientific experimentation were consistently present in all mainstream scientific activity; and that anyone who experienced anything different to this would be operating outside science. I was to find, however, that this was a misplaced assumption. Quantum physics reveals that in the world of the very small, we discover probability, possibility and unpredictability rather than certainty; and that there is no such thing as an 'objective reality', as the presence of the observer influences the nature of the reality that is created. This opened up new possibilities for my ways of knowing.

Historical and Cultural Context

The aim of this chapter is to communicate as clearly as I can the implications of findings from modern science for creating a world view very different to the one that currently dominates Western society. I also want to convey the powerful impact these discoveries had on me, and the reasons why.

In order to do this, I need to place the development of science in its historical and cultural context. The history of science is significant, as it informs us of the social conditions within which this method of gaining knowledge arose, and the cultural reasons why science has come to replace religion as the predominant means of uncovering ultimate truth.

Newtonian Science and Quantum Physics

For many centuries, the Christian Church claimed to be the source of knowledge about the world. Fundamental to its belief system was the conviction that the earth formed the centre of the universe, surrounded by the sun and other planets.

Copernicus, living in the 15th-16th century, challenged this belief. He believed the sun was at rest at the centre of the universe, and that all other bodies revolved around it (Copernicus 1543/1995). Most people at that time, including astronomers and philosophers, discounted the likelihood of this. It was not till many years later that Galileo, in the early 17th century, after building a telescope superior to others being made at that time, began to make discoveries that confirmed Copernicus's theory (Hightower 2001). However, Galileo's support for this theory got him into trouble with

the Roman Catholic Church. In 1633, the Inquisition convicted him of heresy, and forced him to publicly withdraw his support of Copernicus, keeping him for the rest of his life under house arrest.

It is at this early stage that there began to be rooted a deep antagonism between many religious institutions, which professed an omnipotent and transcendental ‘God’ as the source of all truth; and science, whose methods of enquiry were firmly grounded in that which could be observed and measured. Galileo’s originality lay in his ability to reduce problems to a simple set of terms, which he then analysed and resolved according to straightforward mathematical descriptions.

The success with which he applied this technique to the analysis of motion opened the way for modern mathematical and experimental physics. Isaac Newton used one of Galileo’s Mathematical descriptions, “The Law of Inertia” as the foundation for his “First Law of Motion”.
<http://www.lucidcafe.com/library/96feb/galileo.html>
 accessed November 2007)

Isaac Newton was born in 1642, the year that Galileo died. Newton is often seen as the most influential scientist who has ever lived. His accomplishments in mathematics, optics and physics laid the foundations for most of the scientific activity that was to follow from then on.

Newton’s work, and that of scientists who followed him, forms the basis of the materialist worldview which is a dominant force in our modern-day culture. It is based on **a number of assumptions.**

Firstly, it reflects the view that everything in the universe is made of matter, and everything that exists can be reduced to elementary particles of matter. The most elementary particles combine to make atoms, atoms make molecules, molecules make cells, and cells make our brains. Thus **the universe operates as a machine**, where, however complex the final structure, its workings are always to be understood in terms of the interaction of the its material parts.

Secondly, there are laws built into the creation of the universe which determine how these parts can relate to each other. The ‘initial conditions’ which determined these laws were present as an integral aspect of the ‘Big Bang’. **Once all these pre-existing laws are discovered, it will be possible to predict precisely what will happen** under any particular set of circumstances.

Thirdly, **parts of the whole are fundamentally separate from each other.** They interact and connect through forces which can be analysed and quantified. The whole can only be understood through understanding exactly how these parts interact with each other.

Fourthly, there is only ‘one real world’, which can be observed and comprehended by human beings through the five senses, and which is, in essence, **physically measurable.** Any non-material experience, such as thoughts and feelings, have emerged from the material, and are ultimately explainable by the same physical laws.

Fifthly, the human being who is doing the observing and the analysis, can do so in a way that is **detached from that which s/he is observing**. The world is not affected by the observation, and the observer is only affected to the extent that the information s/he has is increased. Further, if the observer knows the ‘laws’ that govern the universe, s/he can apply them to control and manipulate the world to achieve a specified and predictable outcome. In other words, the world exists independently of a person’s mind, and as such, can be studied as an object unaffected by the workings of that mind.

Newton’s influence in the world can be seen to exist in two main spheres. The first of these is the enormous practical consequences of his theories, and those of other scientists who have based their work on his principles and methodology. Our lives have been revolutionised due to the outcomes of science, through, for example, advances in technology and improvements in medical knowledge. There are very few of us who are not surrounded on a daily basis by products of scientific research. It has been remarkably successful in analysing and manipulating the physical environment to achieve specific planned and predicted objectives.

The assumptions on which Newtonian science is based have also had a deeper, much more profound influence. The belief that a lower level of organization determines the appearance/behaviour of a higher level of organization - that is, that the parts determine the appearance of the whole - is known as ‘upward causation’. Christian de Quincey summarises this whole approach as follows:

The focus of science was on analysis of the individual parts—treated as independent components of the machine of nature. By observing how these parts are constituted and how they causally interact, it was believed, science could build up a rational picture of how the whole was mechanically connected. The whole, then—whether an atom, molecule, living cell, human or animal body, or nature itself—could, at least in principle, be understood exclusively in terms of the mechanical, causal interactions of its constituent parts.

.... the “mechanism” of any interaction in nature must always be understood in terms of upward causation—where the fundamental micro constituents cause the properties and behaviour of the macro objects. (de Quincey, 2007)

As we have seen, a consequence of this belief is that everything that emerges from the physical is seen to be secondary to the basic elements, and dependent on them for their existence. This has huge implications for us as human beings, when it comes to understanding our lives. Our experience as embodied beings is completely dependent on our brains. According to Newtonian science, all that the brain produces has its ultimate origins in the particles that go to make up the brain – and when the brain dissolves, so that which it produces completely disappears also.

The brain is seen to be responsible for producing consciousness – and consciousness is responsible for all that you and I are doing now, in terms of reading and interpreting this written material that lies in front of us. It is also the source of all that we do that we have awareness of – loving, imagining, desiring, fearing, longing Without our brain, and without consciousness, we would not be human beings in the way that we currently experience ourselves. The materialist approach to life, supported by the assumptions underpinning mainstream western science, claims to have been very

successful in uncovering the ‘truth’ of the universe. As part of that truth, it says that we are nothing more than the particles with which our body is created. So, the assumptions underpinning Newtonian science have been central in encouraging us to believe that we are no more than our physical bodies – and that we have no existence pre-birth or beyond death.

Many scientists have specifically endorsed this view.

Richard Dawkins has said:

Science is the only way we know to understand the real world. (1995: 19)

Peter Atkins, an eminent chemist, believes that science is able to meet all our intellectual needs. He asserts:

Although poets may aspire to understanding, their talents are more akin to entertaining self-deception. They may be able to emphasise delights in the world, but they are deluded if they and their admirers believe that their identification of the delights and their use of poignant language are enough for comprehension. Philosophers too, I am afraid, have contributed to the understanding of the universe little more than poets ...they have not contributed much that is novel until after novelty has been discovered by scientists – While poetry titillates and theology obfuscates, science liberates. (1995:123)

Stephen Weinberg, author of *The First Three Minutes*, states:

It is almost irresistible for humans to believe that we have some special relation to the universe, that human life is not just a more- or-less farcical outcome of a chain of accidents reaching back to the first three minutes, but that we were somehow built in from the beginning.It is very hard to realise that this is all just a tiny part of an overwhelmingly hostile universe - It is even harder to realise that this present universe has evolved from an unspeakably unfamiliar early condition, and faces a future extinction of endless cold or intolerable heat. The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless. (Weinberg 1977: 154)

Jacques Monod also gives science the credit for separating wishful thinking from what ‘really is’:

Science attacks values ...it subverts every one of the mythical or philosophical ontogenies upon which the animist tradition, from the Australian aborigines to the dialectical materialists, had based morality, values, duties, rights, prohibitions ...Man must at last wake out of his millenary dream and discover his total solitude, his fundamental isolation....He must realise that, like a gypsy, he lives on the boundary of an alien world, a world that is deaf to his music and as indifferent to his hopes as it is to his sufferings and his crimes.. (Values) are his and his alone, but now he is master of them they seem to be dissolving into the uncaring emptiness of space ...

Life appeared on earth; what, before the event, were the chances that this would occur? It’s a priori probability was virtually zero...Immanence is alien

to modern scienceBefore (the human species) did appear its chances of doing so were almost non-existent.The universe was not pregnant with life nor the biosphere with man. Our number came up in the Monte Carlo game. Is it surprising that, like the person who has just made a million in the casino, we should feel strange and a little unreal? (1974: 160, 165, 137)

Colin Blakemore is convinced of the material basis of all experience:

The human brain is a machine which alone accounts for all our actions, our most private thoughts, our beliefs. It creates the state of consciousness, and the sense of self. It makes the mind ...To choose a spouse, a job, a religious creed –or even to choose to rob a bank – is the peak of a causal chain that runs back to the origin of life and down to the nature of atoms and molecules ...we feel ourselves, usually, to be in control of our actions, but that feeling is itself a product of our brain, whose machinery has been designed, on the basis of its functional utility, by means of natural selection. (1998: 269-271)

The metaphor of the universe as a machine has dominated our society. It is not the only metaphor that exists. Religion, and other belief systems that believe in a reality other than the material, have continued to have an influence. However, such belief systems, and any claim they might make to having other means of discovering ‘truth’ have been marginalised. In general, they have been seen to be an aspect of the subjective life of the individual – and as science is only interested in the ‘objective’ world (with the underlying assumption being that the subjective is derived from the objective), then religion is not deemed to be of interest to the scientist. Individuals, be they scientists or not, who happen to believe that there is more to life than the material universe, find themselves caught in a trap that goes something like the following:

1. I feel there may be more to life than I can perceive with my five senses; that perhaps my subjective world has some access to the ‘truth’ of the world that is not available to the positivist methodologies of traditional science.
2. I should like to explore this possibility in ways that help me evaluate the extent to which there may be validity in such a view.
3. There are established methods in place that tell me how I can undertake such evaluation, so that any findings can be judged of sufficient significance to be added to an established ‘body of knowledge’.
4. These methods are based on the assumption that any subjective experience derives from the physical, and is likely to be delusional – and as they are not able to be ‘objectified’, and hence cannot be directly observed and analysed, they cannot be deemed to be part of the ultimate ‘truth’ about the world.

Consequently, a huge gulf has existed between religion and science, which has never been fully resolved.

With the advent of quantum physics, however, many of the assumptions underpinning traditional science have been fundamentally challenged. Classical science has assumed that findings which are relevant for understanding some aspects of the universe are consequently valid for understanding the whole. Experiments have taken place within quantum physics, the results of which have suggested that classical science has been too premature and simplistic in its conclusions.

One of these experiments was undertaken by Alain Aspect and his colleagues in France during the 1980's. Aspect showed that when an atom emitted two photons (that is, two quanta of light), they would continue to influence each other's behaviour, even when they were many miles apart. If, for example, one of the photons was spun, there was a correlating spin in the other photon, even though there had been no intervention with the second. The factor that made this corresponding action so significant was that the effect was instantaneous – no exchange of signals had taken place. There was not even the minutest of delays between the action of each photon.

Within conventionally accepted science, this was seen to be an impossibility. Einstein had shown many years previously that no two objects can ever affect each other instantaneously, because **everything has to travel through space - and this takes time**. He proposed, and scientists accepted, that the maximum speed limit was that of light. Yet the photons emitted by the atom in Aspect's experiment, were influencing each other instantaneously, at a distance, without exchanging signals. Amit Goswami, a physicist, states:

...the influence could not have travelled through space. Instead the influence must belong to a domain of reality that must be recognised as the **transcendent domain of reality**.

(<http://twm.co.nz/goswam1.htm> accessed November 2007, bold in original)

Experimentation also demonstrates that, when an atom is split, revealing an electron, this electron has both particle and wave properties. A particle has a definite size and location, and can penetrate other objects, or bounce off them. A wave, however, can spread out in space, such that it has no clear cut dimensions. Waves have no specific location, and can pass through each other, causing interference patterns. They are not waves that can be located in space and time. Rather, they are seen to be waves of possibility, of potential, that somehow transcend matter. These waves might collapse into particles within space and time – but exactly when and how they might do this cannot be predicted with certain accuracy.

Waves and particles would appear to be fundamentally different kinds of entities, in the same way as a golf ball and a ripple are different entities. It is not possible for one object to be both a golf ball and a ripple. However, electrons, and other subatomic entities, display both particle and wave characteristics. Quantum physics reveals to us a universe that contradicts an understanding of the material world that we take for granted.

Further, research reveals that the form which a subatomic particle takes, is influenced by the type of measurement system that is set up. **The presence of the observer influences when a wave of possibility outside space and time collapses into a particle within space and time**. This has been demonstrated in what has come to be known as “the double slit experiment”. In this experiment, photons are aimed at a barrier with two vertical slits. The photons pass through the slits, and the resulting pattern is recorded on a photographic plate placed at the other side of the barrier.

Photons fired → → → → → Barrier having two Photographic plate, on
 from here slits, with either both.....which pattern is recorded.
 open, or only one open.

The expectation would be that, if one slit is open, and the other closed, there would be a single line of light recorded on the photographic plate, aligned with whichever slit is open; if both slits are open, then there would be two lines of light, aligned with the two slits. The first of these expectations is in fact realised, so that, if only one slit is open, there is a corresponding line of light on the photographic plate. However, when both slits are open, something very different happens. The pattern of light that is reflected on the photographic plate suggests that **each** photon has passed through **both** slits, as they would do if they were behaving as waves.

The implication of this experiment is very difficult to come to terms with. The outcome suggests that the photon has made a decision in response to the action of the researcher, in that it 'knows' whether there is one slit or two slits open, and its behaviour changes accordingly.

There was a further development of this experiment, which reinforced the finding that the intention of the observer influences the outcome. A photodetector was set up between the barrier and the photographic plate, so that the researcher could observe the photons acting as waves after they had passed through the two slits in the barrier. However, what the detector observes is particles – and the resulting pattern on the plate reflects two lines aligned with the two slits, indicating that on this occasion, each photon went through one slit or the other. **It again appears that the act of observation alone (with no physical interference from the researcher) changes the behaviour of the photons, resulting in them acting as particles.**

It would seem, then, that as long as observation of the photons does not take place, they remain as waves, spreading out through space with no definite position, not deciding to go through one slit or the other, but going through both. However, as soon as there is an attempt to observe them, and measure what happens, the wave collapses into a particle, and 'decides' to go one way or the other – resulting in the two lines of light on the photographic plate. In other words, the presence of the researcher influences the behaviour of the photon – **demonstrating that the external world cannot be studied and understood, independent of the presence of the observer.** With no observation, the photons behaved as waves; with observation, they behaved as particles.

The only explanation for this is to state that the electron is intrinsically both a wave and a particle. According to our conventional understanding of reality, this is impossible. Hence, it suggests that we have far to go to acquire a truly comprehensive understanding of reality.

A key learning for me at this point was that, in terms of a way of knowing, a major area of weakness had been identified in science, if it could be shown that the behaviour of a photon was not predictable, and clearly did not respond to mechanical principles. If the assumptions of Newtonian science could be shown to be invalid when investigating some aspects of the material world, then there was no reason for their validity to be taken for granted when enquiring into the vast range of intuitive, emotional and spiritual experiences. In fact, I would go as far as to say that, except under very specific conditions, the findings of science itself required that the soundness of these assumptions must surely be questioned in many if not most areas of human inquiry.

Further research in quantum physics has revealed that nothing is predictable; outcomes can only be forecast as probabilities. It seems that, in ways currently not comprehensible, **the consciousness of the observer influences action**, even in circumstances where the researcher makes every attempt to control the context in which the experiment is taking place.

Alan Wallace states:

Experiment does not inform us of the ontological status, or intrinsic nature, of micro-objects as they exist apart from measurement. Given one system of measurement, results are produced that suggest the presence of a wave phenomenon; given another system, the “same” measured object seems to be a particle. In the absence of any system of measurement, we have no evidence of waves, particles, potential, or anything else. We may conclude, according to the above principle, that an electron existing as an independent entity is in principle unknowable; therefore this independent entity does not exist as a potentiality, for it does not exist at all. (1996: 76)

In physics, it is said that this phenomena indicates that an unobserved quantum entity exists in ‘coherent superposition’ of all possible ‘states’, until an observer makes a measurement capable of distinguishing between these states, and the entity is forced to collapse into a single state. The presence of the observer influences the nature of reality that is created. Before the intrusion of the observer, there is no one reality; rather a number of possible realities co-exist.

Erwin Schrodinger (1944) created a thought experiment to communicate more easily the principle of superposition. A live cat is placed in a thick steel box. Also within the steel box, there is a bit of radioactive substance, that has equal probability of decaying, or not decaying. If it decays, the cat will die. If it does not decay, the cat will live. The theory of superposition suggests that, while the situation is not observed, both possibilities will continue to exist – that is, that the cat will be **both alive and dead**. It is not until the box is opened, and the inside is observed that the superposition is lost, and the cat becomes one or the other (that is, dead or alive).

This, of course, seems quite bizarre in relation to our ‘normal’ way of understanding of reality. The findings in quantum physics have baffled even the most eminent scientists. On a Radio 4 programme, ‘In Our Time’, (May 2002) chaired by Melvyn Bragg, scientist John Gribbins stated with great emphasis and clarity: “If you think that quantum physics does not make sense, that is because it **just – does - not – make - sense**!”

There are two major interpretations of the findings from quantum theory. One, the Copenhagen Interpretation, proposed by Niels Bohr (1934), is based on the principle of superposition. This claims that an object remains in all possible states simultaneously, and cannot be assumed to have any specific properties, until it is measured – at which point, it collapses into a single reality.

The second interpretation is known as the ‘many worlds’ theory, said to have been supported by both Stephen Hawking and Richard Feynman (Bryanton 2006). This proposes that as soon as a potential exists for any object to be in any state, the universe of that object transmutes into a series of parallel universes equal to the number of possible states in which that object can exist. Further, there is a mechanism for interaction between these universes that somehow permits all states to be accessible in some way, and for all possible states to be affected in some manner.

The significant factor about the whole area of quantum physics is that, despite the fact that it defies daily experience, and would appear to be nonsensical, the principles and the mathematics supporting them are essential for practical applications including, for example, lasers, quantum optics and quantum computing.

As a lay person I am, of course, unable to fully comprehend the details of experiments within quantum physics, and the implications of their findings. However, it is sufficient for me to know that our conventional understanding of the world, as shaped by classical science, has been shown from within science itself to be completely inadequate. Findings in quantum physics invalidate the assumptions underpinning Newtonian science, and present a radical challenge to the way of understanding the world that underpins contemporary life in western society.

Personally, I find this very liberating; as it has been demonstrated that science does not yet hold all the answers to how the universe operates, and has finally discovered that the world does indeed work in mysterious and incomprehensible ways. Given that the scientific ‘way of knowing’ has been found to be fallible, I feel this provides a strong basis for me and others to justify as valid alternative ways of understanding our experience as human beings on this planet.

However, the assumptions of classical science have a powerful influence on western culture. Before moving on to explore other ways of knowing, I wanted to examine in greater depth the implications of basing methods of gaining knowledge about the world on assumptions of classical science – a perspective that is known as ‘scientism’.

Chapter 8

The Assumptions and Consequences of Scientism

As part of the growth of my educational knowledge, I engaged with the assumptions of scientism and my experience of their limits in relation to my creative possibilities. The practice of science in the western world is often associated with and influenced by scientism, though the two are not intrinsically inevitable companions. Scientism is the belief that only the empirical methodology of Newtonian science can discover the truth about the world and reality. I contend that the assumptions of scientism play an influential role in our secular society; and in so doing, limit the creative possibilities within us, and restrict ways of knowing that might enable us to realise our true potential as human beings.

So what are the implications for our understanding of reality?

This is not a thesis based on quantum physics. However, it is a thesis that develops the argument that as human beings, we have a far more limited understanding of life, and live much more limited and constraining lives than we might be doing. From my early experiences in residential child care, and my consequent attempts to understand myself, the young people in my care, and the society responsible for creating the conditions that led to such distress, I knew not only that my ignorance was huge, but that this reflected a lack of knowledge in the world. It was now beginning to dawn on me why, despite such an extensive search for knowledge in all kinds of institutions, all over the world, such fundamental ignorance continued. **My growing conviction was that we self-limit our potential, due to the fact that we have internalised a world view which tells us we are primarily material beings, and that as such, we are limited by laws that determine what is possible in a material universe.** This world view has been built on the assumptions of Newtonian science. However, findings from modern science, based on verifiable experimentation, are revealing that these assumptions are false, and that in fact the essential principles underpinning the workings of the universe are radically different. They are so different that our minds, entrenched as they are in the 'old' assumptions and the forms of perception that arise from them, are not able to properly grasp a world view based on a very different notion of reality. It is, for example, difficult to come to grips with the possibility that there may well be a reality outside space and time – and that this reality affects things inside space and time.

I went through a learning curve that completely challenged the capacity of my brain. In learning about modern science, I was introduced to concepts and ideas, the implications of which were so enormous, my brain had great difficulty in coming to grips with them. I cannot tell the number of times that my head has 'hurt', and I have felt completely disorientated as a consequence of the ideas I have been trying to get to comprehend. But first, I had to learn that the reason I was so overwhelmed by these ideas was because they challenged the set of very powerful assumptions that not only underpinned

traditional science; but also pervaded all aspects of decision making in our society; and that **both myself and those I interacted with on a daily basis were far more influenced by these assumptions than we realised.** I would, in fact, go so far as to say that we have been unconsciously but thoroughly indoctrinated by them, so powerful is the hold that they have in mainstream society. Many scientists say that religious believers are deluded by the Church. I would maintain that we have been equally deluded by 'scientism'; that is, a commitment to the assumptions of materialist science.

I found Charles Tart to be the writer who most clearly communicated this learning to me. I could relate to certain aspects of his early experience of religion. He was as a child confirmed into a Lutheran (Protestant) church, up to which time he accepted without demur what he was taught. However, he began to question certain aspects of what went on in the church. When, for example, during confirmation classes at the age of twelve, he asked what the word 'adultery' meant in the ten commandments, the pastor blushed, and would not answer the question. Tart was made to feel he was in the wrong to ask; and yet at the same time could not understand what was stopping the pastor giving him an honest answer. Tart also began to witness a substantial amount of hypocrisy in church members; and conversely, to know other adults whom he respected but who were non-religious, or even explicitly anti-religion.

As he grew into adulthood, Tart had two main areas of interest. One was in science; the second was in psychical research and parapsychology. He revelled in finding out how things worked, and saw science as providing the vehicle to achieve this. He initially saw no conflict between religion and science, perceiving that religion honoured the creative power responsible for the universe, complemented by science, which aimed to understand how it was designed.

Science was (and still is to me) a noble quest, based on a dedicated, disciplined, and basically spiritual commitment to discover and serve Truth at all costs and on a humility where you admit to and refine your wrong opinions and failed experiments. (Tart 1997: 37)

However, he began to realise that the scientific community had little respect for religion, seeing it as not having anything of value to offer. Indeed, Tart had some sympathy with this.

My later studies of clinical psychology, as well as my increasing understanding of my own neurotic shortcomings, showed innumerable examples of Western religious beliefs cutting people off from reality and acting as the seeds and causes of all kinds of psychopathology. (ibid: 37)

In the main, institutionalised religions call for people to blindly accept sets of beliefs and doctrines, which are scientifically unprovable. Science will not accept anything to be true, unless there is verifiable evidence for it. Scientists have traditionally dealt with this conflict in two different ways. Some ignore the conflict, and separate their work as scientists, and their religious beliefs, into different compartments. They may attend church on a regular basis; but for the rest of the time, engage in an activity that excludes any aspect of religious or spiritual practices.

The second response is to reject religion completely, and to perceive science as the sole means of gaining the truth about the world. Tart acknowledges the fact that for many

centuries, religion had been seen as the source of all knowledge. However, the advent of science presented a challenge to religion; and because science was able to provide evidence for its findings, and could make predictions about what would happen in the world under certain specified conditions, it was seen as being more effective in revealing the truth.

The success of science in generating verifiable information led many people to believe the methods it used were providing the only valid means of creating reliable knowledge. If something could not be perceived by one of the five senses, or measured by a physical instrument, then it was not real. In addition, as only matter was amenable to this kind of scrutiny and measurement, then only matter was real.

Tart summarises the situation as follows:

If someone wants to consciously adopt a materialistic philosophy of life, or any particular set of religious beliefs, that's all right with me. I firmly believe that people should be able to choose their beliefs, as long as they are willing to be responsible for the consequences, and treat everyone else decently. Unfortunately, my psychological studies have shown me that most of us were pressured and conditioned, seduced and brainwashed, into particular belief systems when we were children, with little knowledge, consciousness, and choice involved. (ibid: 40)

Tart continues by saying that the assumptions underpinning science can be presented as a 'Western Creed'. He acknowledges that these are an extreme statement of beliefs, but asks people to reflect on the extent to which such beliefs have been internalised by them, and the extent to which they are reinforced, directly and indirectly, in contemporary culture.

I believe in the material universe as the only and ultimate reality – a universe controlled by fixed physical laws and blind chance.

I affirm that the universe has no creator, no objective purpose, and no objective meaning or destiny.

I maintain that all ideas about God or gods, enlightened beings, prophets and saviours, or other non-physical beings or forces, are superstitions and delusions. Life and consciousness are totally identical to physical processes, and arose from chance interactions of blind physical forces. Like the rest of life, *my* life, and *my* consciousness, has no objective purpose, meaning or destiny.

I believe that all judgments, values, and moralities, whether my own or others, are subjective, arising solely from biological determinants, personal history, and chance. Free will is an illusion. Therefore the most rational values I can personally live by must be based on the knowledge that for *me*, what pleases me is Good, what pains me is Bad. Those who please me or help me avoid pain are my friends; those who pain me or keep me from my pleasure are my enemies. Rationality requires that my friends and enemies be used in ways that maximize my pleasure, and minimise my pain.

I affirm that churches have no real use other than social support; that there are no objective sins to commit or be forgiven for; that there is no divine or supernatural retribution for sin or reward for virtue, although there may be social consequences of actions. Virtue for *me* is getting what *I* want, without being caught and punished by others.

I maintain that the death of the body is the death of the mind. There is no after life – and all hope of such is nonsense. (ibid: 41-42)

It is when I reached this stage of Tart's exposition that it began to dawn on me that, completely unconsciously, I had been deeply influenced by several of these beliefs. This felt quite shocking to me. Whilst at University, my studies in sociology had taught me that much of what we learn and take from granted about life is absorbed from the norms, values and beliefs of the culture we live in. I had long agreed with David Smail when he maintained:

Few of us question that the concepts we find ready and waiting for us on our entry into the social world do anything but reflect an 'obvious' reality. A 20th Century baby destined to be an astronaut is about to imbibe a cultural world very different from that of a 14th Century monk - but neither at the time carries any more conviction for the individual. It takes an act of imagination to criticise our own values and beliefs. Unless we question, our world will not evolve at all. (1984:101)

I had looked at my own values and beliefs; but it seems not consciously enough. I had thought that, because of the educational process I had experienced, I would be more aware of such cultural influences, and hence stay free from social conditioning. Now it seemed that this was not the case. What a situation to get to grips with!

Consequently, my reading of quantum physics was a revelation to me. It was a revelation on two levels. Firstly, it seemed that science, the discipline to which the western world had given the status of 'finder of the truth', was now saying that the universe was not a pre-determined entity, with fixed laws that governed what was and was not possible. **Rather, the universe was waiting to be created, with limitless possibilities as to how that creation might unfold; and we, as integral and active participants in that process, played a central role in determining which of the possibilities became an actuality.**

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly for me, as one of these participants, I had far greater power than I had previously thought possible in influencing the nature of that creation. Quantum physics told me that the expectations the observer had of that which s/he observed, the questions that were asked, and the action that was taken, would influence the nature of the reality that was created. So why should not the expectations I had, the questions I asked, and the actions I took, influence the reality I created?

I had accepted that there was a spiritual dimension to my being, which I could trust as a way of knowing; however, I had not really considered the possibility that it might also be the source of truly creative action, if I allowed it more free flow in my life.

I realised that the reason I did not live with this mind-set was that, in the culture I was brought up in, permeated as it was with the assumptions of traditional science, I had absorbed the belief that all options open to me were regulated by the pre-given laws which governed the whole universe. I could not create any reality that did not abide by these laws. My experience of 'consciousness' was pre-determined, and completely shaped by my physical make-up. I could perhaps slightly influence the immediate

contexts I was in – for example, if I smiled and was pleasant with people, they were likely to be pleasant in return, with possible future benefits to me. Being aware of the ‘psychology of behaviour’ could be advantageous – as long as there was an awareness that ultimately, this existed within the confines of the known physical laws. Similarly, the concept of ‘mind over matter’ was accepted, when used in relation to a person psychologically determined to bear the pain of a dentist’s drill without an injection. Stories told of people who defeated cancer through mental processes such as imaging and positive thinking, however, were rejected by the scientific establishment, which claimed that there had to be another, more ‘rational’ (i.e. materialist) basis to the recovery. Individuals pro-actively using their consciousness to engage in truly creative activity, which went beyond known physical laws, was not accepted as an option.

Scientism limits our understanding of the possibilities of consciousness. If we challenge the assumptions of scientism, then our whole understanding of what consciousness is capable of takes on an altogether different perspective. I was interested in examining different theories concerning the role and origins of consciousness, and their implications for developing a way of knowing that satisfied my search for meaning. I was particularly interested in investigating the idea that we were (individually and collectively) involved in an ‘evolution of consciousness’. I also very much wanted to develop my inner personal exploration of consciousness through journaling and ‘being still’, and if possible locate it within a theoretical framework that helped me make sense of what I was experiencing.

However, firstly I wanted to consider what reasons there might be for so many people having difficulty in accepting the possible implications of findings from modern science, and engaging in a different form of exploration. In moving forward with my own action research enquiry, I needed to evaluate the validity of the reasons as to why others seemed resistant to following a similar path, given I felt the evidence to do so was so overwhelming. I came to the conclusion that it was fear that played a major role in inhibiting many people’s capacity to look at things differently.

Chapter 9

Psychology of Fear

Although I was excited by the implications of what I had discovered about quantum physics, I realised that not everyone felt the same. Those who seemed most reluctant to talk about what the findings might mean were often physicists themselves. After talking to some of them in considerable depth, I came to the conclusion that what held them back was fear. They had psychological difficulty taking on board the implications; it was as though if they did, it would threaten the security of their total belief system. Consequently, they stayed with the way of knowing that was familiar to them; and maintained a belief that further discoveries would identify the 'errors' that had been made, enabling them to return to the established assumptions. I suggest that fear is a powerful force that adversely affects the development of ways of knowing which support the full flourishing of creative and meaningful possibilities.

Mansfield asks why conventional scientists look sceptically, even scornfully, on phenomena that challenge their existing world view, even in areas where there is strong empirical evidence to support the challenge.

This is a complex question, but some of their resistance is simply built into science. There is always a good bit of healthy scepticism in science toward anything controversial, especially something as far-reaching in its implications. However, that on its own hardly explains the conventional resistance. Surely a large part of it must come from the realisation, if only partly conscious, that the reality of these phenomena seriously challenges many of the fundamental presuppositions underlying modern science. No scientist wants his or her worldview turned upside down, especially if it's done by using the tools of science. (Mansfield 1992: 220)

Dean Radin, when exploring the same issue, suggests that:

The answer is contained in the odd fact that we do not perceive the world as it is, but as we wish it to be. We know this through decades of conventional research in perception, cognition, decision making, intuitive judgment, and memory. Essentially, we construct mental models of a world that reflect our expectations, biases, and desires, a world that is comfortable for our egos, that does not threaten our beliefs, and that is consistent, stable and coherent.

In other words, our minds are "story generators" that create mental simulations of what is really out there. These models inevitably perpetuate distortions, because what we perceive is influenced by the hidden persuasions of ideas, memory, motivation, and expectations. (Radin 1997: 229)

An understanding of cognitive dissonance may be relevant when considering why many scientists are so reluctant to accept the possibility of subjective experience and consciousness being causal factors for what happens in the world. Social psychologist Leon Festinger (1957) introduced cognitive dissonance as a psychological state which occurs when evidence is produced which is incompatible with a currently held belief. Cognitive dissonance theory states that when dissonance occurs the situation can be resolved by either discarding the new evidence or discarding the old belief. A critical aspect of cognitive dissonance theory is that the contradictory evidence must be credible, otherwise it could be rejected without further thought. Once dissonance is created, the discomfort is so great, people are highly motivated to resolve it.

There are two alternative courses of action. The first is to abandon the original way of seeing things; the second is to disregard the conflicting information. The individual will tend towards the solution that is easiest to manage. If the dissonance is sufficiently strong, and is not reduced in some way, the uncomfortable feeling can develop into anger, fear and even hostility. According to Aronson (1969), the amount of dissonance a person can experience is directly proportional to the effort they have invested in their behaviour. When there is extreme discomfort, and the person feels unable to adapt to the different way of seeing things, they may respond by making disparaging comments about those who represent the different opinion. This can be seen when scientists make negative comments about ideas and opinions which they do not think meet the stringent standards of proper scientific research.

However, Mansfield does not believe that any of this provides a satisfactory explanation as to why there is such a resistance to evidence that challenges a materialistic perspective. Responses to cognitive dissonance are descriptive, rather than explanatory. It may be that the reasons are rooted in much deeper psychological forces than have so far been discovered. In being asked to create a model of the world that is radically different to the one we have been accustomed to, we are being asked to give up the security of that which we know well; and to venture into the unknown and the unfamiliar. What would it feel like to be forcibly taken to an alien country, about whose culture we know nothing, and which may potentially contain all kinds of unpleasant, even horrific experiences? Facing the complete unknown can be a fearful experience, which we will seek to avoid at all costs.

In this context, it is worth exploring the role of fear in our lives. Dorothy Rowe starts her book, *Beyond Fear*, with the following words:

This book is about a secret. It is a secret which all of us, men and women, children and adults, the powerful and the weak, the happy and the unhappy, conspire to keep.

It is a secret which we keep from one another, it is a secret we keep from ourselves. The secret is fear.

We can admit to all sorts of things about ourselves – that we don't like talking about death, that some things make us anxious, that we worry a lot – but we try never to say, even to ourselves, 'I am afraid'.

Fear is too fearful to be discussed. We talk about what we do to protect ourselves from our fear – we worry about practical things or unlikely eventualities, or we work hard, or become bad-tempered or extremely

powerful, or we cling tenaciously to some religious or political faith, or we drink too much, or become ill or depressed, and so on – but we do not talk about the total, annihilating terror we feel whenever we as much as glimpse our own insignificance, vulnerability, helplessness, isolation, weakness and fragility in this limitless, incomprehensible cosmos.

So much of what we do, and all the theories we have created about why we do what we do, are defences against this fear, but the fear itself is not acknowledged.So many of the theories about what we do to defend against the unnamed and unacknowledged fear have to do with behaviour which is a problem, such as being addicted to drugs ‘Sane’ behaviour is not seen as being a defence against the unacknowledged fear. Yet it is, for every moment of the day each of us is engaged in creating, maintaining and defending a structure which we call ‘myself, my life, my world’. Continual defence is necessary, for the ever-moving, ever-changing cosmos can reveal to us at any moment that our precious structures are as fragile as a matchstick house, and can be swept away like matchsticks in a stream.

.....We insist that our perception of ourself, our life and our world is the only true reality. Threats to our structures usually come when other people insist that their constructions are the correct ones. A power struggle ensues, and the winner is the person who makes his structure prevail. (Rowe 1987:11-12)

Dorothy Rowe is a clinical psychologist, whose writings include numerous case studies of people she has worked with in therapy, as well as records of conversations with others whom she has interviewed as a means of learning more about how they come to perceive life in the way they do (e.g. 1978, 1987, 1989, 1991). She then analyses the relationship between the beliefs individuals have developed, and the quality and nature of their day-to-day experiences.

Rowe’s writings are underpinned by a theoretical framework rooted in a ‘social construction of reality’; she believes that individuals develop their own constructs about what constitutes reality, and interpret everything that happens to them within those constructs. In *Beyond Fear*, she explores in depth the nature of the connection between people’s adherence to the constructs they have developed about critical aspects of their lives. This operates as a means of keeping existential fear at bay, which can arise when an individual feels in a place of insecurity or uncertainty.

Science as a profession has developed its own constructs of reality, which are reflected in the assumptions that underpin their scientific world view, and in the methods they use to investigate their perception of reality. Because their constructs include a belief in the superiority of their own methods of gaining knowledge; and because their core assumptions deny the significance of emotions and feeling in understanding the truth about life; they are not likely to consider that psychology has relevance for them. A tendency to see all aspects of their inner world as emerging from the brain and hence being ultimately illusory, does not encourage a perception of emotional intelligence as having significance; that is, they will not consider it important to be aware of and deal appropriately with feelings in themselves and others.

However, scientists are human beings too. Their education and training does not make them immune from the same kind of emotions as others – including that of fear. As

Rowe suggests, one of the ways that people manage fear is to build constructs that provide them with security.

The fragility of our structures is always a cause for fear. ...Every day, we have to find an optimum balance between freedom and security. We cannot have both. The more free we are, the less secure; and the more secure, the less free. (Rowe1987: 14)

One of the main reasons that many scientists may find it difficult to question their own assumptions regarding, for example, the primacy of the material, with all aspects of personal, subjective experience being derivatives of the material, is because it would require a radical change in their construction of reality. They may gain security from the beliefs and methods which have historically driven their professional activities, and result in evidence based knowledge. They may feel safe in a world which is knowable and controllable, governed by immutable laws. Discovering that the world is, in fact essentially more uncertain, may offer exciting creative possibilities, and a freedom from artificial boundaries they have placed on their own potential; but it also means being confronted with the unknown.

The main difficulty in exploring and assimilating the wide ranging implications of quantum physics into mainstream science may lie more in the psychological problems which individual scientists, whose world view is founded on the assumptions of scientism, will experience in facing this challenge, rather than the capacity of their intelligence to make the shift. It would also require them to acknowledge that their traditional view of the world is too limited, and that other disciplines, such as psychology, may offer complementary information about the world that needs to be valued and legitimated. Given that the physical sciences have long viewed their methods of gaining knowledge as being supreme, it will take some courage to accept that perhaps they have been mistaken.

The courageous person does not deny fear, but acknowledges it and faces it. Only through courage can we find a sustaining happiness. (ibid: 15)

The role of fear in inhibiting human potential and creativity, and how fear could be overcome, was an issue that would be re-visited at various times during my enquiry. At this point, though, I wanted to explore in more depth what was meant by the word 'consciousness', and what was emerging from a growing discipline entitled a 'science of consciousness'.

Chapter 10

Developing a Science of Consciousness

My realisation that the materialist assumptions underpinning scientism were not supported by findings within quantum physics led me to appreciate that we were still a long way from finding a 'way of knowing' that could reliably give us the truth of who, as a human race, we are and what we are doing here. In fact we did not know the answer to a hugely significant question: is matter primary, and does our experience of consciousness emerge from matter; or has matter emerged from a non-material (spiritual) source, with consciousness being ultimately either the nature, or a property, of this source?

Whatever the answer was, it had huge implications for us in terms of whether we have been created as a consequence of arbitrary chance events; or alternatively, whether we might be an integral part of a larger, very purposeful enterprise.

Given that the former explanation would mean that the universe had no ultimate meaning, whereas the latter opened up all kinds of exciting possibilities, I explored the ideas of others in relation to the role and origins of consciousness, and their implications for my developing a way of knowing that satisfied my search for meaning. .

Introduction

I was now aware that the conflict in world views I had experienced for so long had in large part been perpetuated by beliefs rooted in the assumptions of scientific materialism. I realised, for example, that there was no 'proof' to justify the theory that matter was the primary stuff of the universe, with all forms of consciousness arising at a later stage of the evolutionary process. There was, of course, no empirical proof to support the view that consciousness was primary, and matter emerged from consciousness. However, at least there was, from an evidential point of view, as much reason to explore either possibility.

I had always been interested in the study of consciousness, triggered initially by my access into what felt like an expanded state of consciousness when I was journaling, or when I felt 'at one' with the universe in some still quiet place. It also felt as though the source of experiences such as intuitive impulses and synchronistic events were located somewhere in my consciousness, rather than in the external world. Consequently, I decided to revisit my existing ideas of consciousness, and investigate what current work was taking place in this area.

Initial encounters with a Science of Consciousness

My introduction to the idea of a science of consciousness was through *The Psychology of Consciousness* by Robert Ornstein, first printed in 1972. In the preface to a third edition, published in 1986, Ornstein states that in the fifteen years since this book was first written,

A new field has come into being – the study of consciousness.More people now understand that consciousness, far from being irrelevant to our society and our future, is at the center of possible human adaptation and survival. Already workers in international political theory are taking work on consciousness as central; workers in ecology are beginning to realise that without a profound change in our understanding of ourselves, no major social goal can be accomplished. (Ornstein1986: vii)

His first chapter starts off with a story:

A man, having looted a city, tried to sell one of the spoils, an exquisite rug. “Who will give me 100 gold pieces for this rug?” he cried throughout the town. After the sale was completed, a comrade approached the seller, and asked, “Why did you not ask more for that precious rug?” “Is there any number higher than 100?” asked the seller? (ibid: vii)

Ornstein makes the point that, although we may feel smug about the ability of the rugseller relative to ourselves, we should beware. We are similar to him, in that our conceptions of consciousness limit what it is possible for us to understand. Ornstein then states:

We seem to set mental limits on the possible boundaries of our world and work within these limits. According to most surveys, we are quite satisfied, satisfied with our lives, and our concept of who we are and what we can do. For most upwardly mobile Westerners prosperity continues, prospects are on the rise. But we are like the rugseller in many ways – our sights are too low. Is there anything beyond what we know of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.It is my view that humans are a much more extraordinary animal than we yet know. ...There are many people, especially successful ones, who do not understand that our possibilities are greater in some directions, greater than anything we can currently consider. It is also my view that the dangers inherent in human life and even in being human are increasing daily as our control over the physical environment becomes greater and greater. (ibid: vii)

I could relate to this view. The learning I had gained from my reading of quantum physics, the messages arising from the core teaching of most spiritual traditions, and my own personal experience supported Ornstein’s view that we had artificially constrained our thinking in western society. The conditioning we had received regarding what were acceptable ways of gaining knowledge did seem to restrict what was possible for us. From the moment we are born, we are taught to value the external world, and compartmentalise our inner life into a section headed ‘private life – not of relevance to those seeking to develop the truth of humanity’.

In a volume of *Psychology Today*, Idries Shah, a leading exponent on Sufism, is talking to Elizabeth Hall about conditioning, and the Sufi perspective:

Hall: You say that conditioning gets in the way of responses to Sufi material. But everyone is conditioned from birth, so how does one ever escape from his conditioning?

Shah: We can't live in the world without being conditioned. Even the control of one's bladder is conditioned. It is absurd to talk, as some do, of deconditioned or nonconditioned people. But it is possible to see why conditioning has taken place and why a person's beliefs become oversimplified.

Nobody is trying to abolish conditioning, merely to describe it, to make it possible to change it, and also to see where it needs to operate, and where it does not. Some sort of secondary personality, which we call the "commanding self" takes over man when his mentation is not correctly balanced. This self, which he takes for his real one, is in fact a mixture of emotional impulses and various pieces of conditioning. As a consequence of Sufi experience, people – instead of seeing things through a filter of conditioning plus emotional reactions, a filter which constantly discards certain stimuli – can see things through some part of themselves that can only be described as not conditioned.

Hall: Are you saying that when one comes to an awareness that he is conditioned, he can operate aside from it? He can say, "Why do I believe all this? Well, perhaps it is because"

Shah: Exactly. Then he is halfway toward being liberated from his conditioning – or at least toward keeping it under control. People who say that we must smash conditioning are themselves oversimplifying things.

(Quoted in Ornstein 1986: 225)

A central part of my enquiry was to identify what aspects of my conditioning were useful, and what needed to be set aside, if I were to satisfy the deepest yearnings within me. The learning I had gained through my enquiry to date encouraged me to trust my intuition. I also felt that the 'science of consciousness' which Ornstein spoke of was critical if we were to evolve in the way that was intended of us. **Consciousness forms the essence of who we are; it seemed vital that we became more conscious of the nature and potential of our consciousness. This process I perceived to be an 'evolution of consciousness'; and I was interested in exploring the idea further.**

Because of this interest, I gravitated towards, and subscribed to, a new publication, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, produced in 1994; I attended a conference entitled *Beyond the Brain: New Avenues in Consciousness Research* held in Cambridge in 1995; and a further conference *Toward a Science of Consciousness* in Tucson, Arizona, in 1996. During that time, there began to be a steady increase in books published around this area. A Science of Consciousness was clearly becoming a significant field of human enquiry; and I was glad to be part of it.

One of the articles printed in the first issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, was by Willis Harman. At that time, Harman was Professor Emeritus of Engineering-Economic Systems at Stanford University. His article was written as an outcome of a retreat held in California at the end of 1992, attended by 15 scientists and philosophers. Their aim was to investigate the question of an appropriate epistemology for consciousness research. They were exploring the issue: *How does it happen that our powerful methods of scientific enquiry appear so ill-suited to the study of consciousness? And if understanding our own consciousness is so central to*

understanding anything else, will we not have to take this question more seriously than has been the case so far?

Harman summarised the situation as he saw it:

The scientific exploration of phenomena and experience relating to consciousness has long been hampered by two obstacles. One is that subjective experience does not meet the commonly accepted criteria for data in a scientific analysis, in that it is not public, objective, and replicable. The other is that many consciousness-related phenomena do not appear to fit comfortably into the accepted scientific worldview. For instance, the common-sense assumption that conscious volition is causal – that my desire can cause things to happen – conflicts with the assumption of mainstream science that the universe operates according to causal laws which can be objectively known. (Harman 2004: 140)

Harman's summary of the situation was a confirmation for me of what I felt I had learned from my investigation into the history, principles and limitations of Newtonian science; of the challenges that quantum physics had presented to traditional science and the core assumptions underpinning it; and the extent to which the world view created by classical science had severely limited the research methods that were seen to be legitimate means of gaining knowledge about the world we live in. It was this last that was of real importance to me. **The initial triggers to this enquiry – issues such as the causes and solutions to pain and suffering – were not seen as being appropriate topics for scientific research. And yet, my feeling was that it was knowledge of that order that we required if we were truly to flourish as human beings.** In my own personal life, I certainly appreciated material possessions such as a home with time-saving devices, a comfortable car, and a high quality music system. However, as with many if not most people, the way I felt, and the quality of my relationships with others, were of far greater significance than the external products of science and technology. If I had to choose between the health and well-being of my family, or winning seven million pounds on the lottery giving me the opportunity to buy all the material possessions I would wish, I am sure my feeling that there was actually no choice would be shared by many others.

Consequently, to hear the traditional community of physical scientists say that the subject of relationships and human flourishing was not of relevance to them – and the study of these would not help uncover the 'truth' about the universe – seemed to me to be short-sighted, to say the least. I had come to realise that the area that was being excluded was that of consciousness; for it was within consciousness that all subjective dimensions of life were located. There was an urgent need to understand it more – which would require a new methodology, based on a different set of assumptions.

Having come to that conclusion, I wondered why so many scientists had difficulty acknowledging the need to study subjective experiences of consciousness. The more I learned, the more I realised that the principles of scientific materialism defy everyday experience. Scientists are in the situation they are in, because they have made a choice to go in that direction – that is, their conscious will has caused them to be there. However, as Harman stated, they do not accept that their conscious will is a causal factor. Materialists deal with this by stating their apparent free will can, in theory (though not supported by evidence), be explained in terms of scientific laws. This

implies that everything they do is pre-determined by these laws, and that ultimately they have no choice in terms of what they do with their lives.

Given that there is no indisputable proof to verify the idea that laws prescribe all that goes on in the universe, classical scientists (and those who subscribe to this perspective), are basing their lives on the unfounded belief that conscious will is an illusion, and hence they themselves, in being subject to these universal pre-determined laws, are essentially robotic. Not only is there no certain evidence to support such a view; but it runs counter to experience. Most of us would accept that we have free will to choose, for example, whether we take a holiday, and if so, where. Do I really accept the message that traditional science conveys – that is, the choice we make is pre-programmed into us? Or do we question the unproven assumption on which this belief is based, and enquire into other possible explanations? But then we are blocked by scientism again – because it tells us there are no valid ways of enquiring into this – no acceptable research methods that will generate useful data: a statement, which although made as though fact, is based on the same unproven assumptions.

Personally this seems absurd. It would appear more reasonable to question the assumptions, look at other possibilities, and generate methods of research based on these differing possibilities. This may sound easy – but indeed it is not. To do so would be to undermine the whole basis of science, and question its status as the main source of knowledge. As principles and assumptions of science inform the institutional structures in our society, as well as the world view and decision making of individuals, the social foundations of our culture would be fundamentally challenged. Of course, this is what I want to do, as I see these principles and assumptions being the main cause of behaviours that limit our potential, and lead many people to experience distressing and depressing lives, which consequently results in pain and suffering. However, resistance to change is great; we can feel the attraction of subscribing to the principle ‘better the devil you know’. The possibility that the ‘new way of being’ may in fact provide a far better quality of life may not be sufficient to encourage people to face the uncertainty of change – especially when attitudes and opinions are so firmly held that they are experienced as an aspect of individual identity. If new methods of research are to be developed, then they need to take into consideration the complex issue of how to encourage and then support people through the fears of facing the unknown, and engaging in major change processes.

Defining Consciousness

Because no-one knows what consciousness is from a third person objective perspective, it has not been possible to create a precise description with which everyone is in agreement. Guven Guzeldere, in his analysis of the study of consciousness, identifies the difficulties in forming a definition:

The phenomenon of consciousness does not have clear-cut boundaries, and its complex structure does not admit any easy formulation. Even if it is in principle possible to invent a ‘consciousness monitor,’ a device that would ‘detect’ the physical signs of the presence of consciousness, no such technology is anywhere in sight, as it is not even known what exactly is to be measured.

The root of the problem lies deeper than the inadequacy of the technology, or the lack of sufficient data, however. What seems to be critically lacking is also a solid theoretical framework to ground and facilitate the experimental research. For example, there is really no established consensus, even in the medical field, as to what should count as the criteria of consciousness, to demarcate the domain of the conscious from that of the unconscious or the nonconscious. The problem with building a consciousness monitor is not confined to a lack of sufficiently fine-grained measuring instruments; it ultimately has to do with not knowing where to begin measuring, and where to end up with measured quantities.

To make things worse it is not clear whether everyone means the same thing by the term 'consciousness', even within the bounds of a single discipline. There is considerable variation in people's pre-theoretic intuitions, for instance in regard to what kinds of organisms or systems, and under which conditions, consciousness can be attributed. ...How many senses of consciousness are there, and how are we to taxonomise them? (1995: 30-31)

In other words, scientists have no explanation for consciousness. They have no instrument for measuring what or who contains consciousness, nor to what extent. They cannot differentiate between the consciousness of an amoeba, a dog, or a human. They have no means of telling whether or not consciousness permeates a flower or a tree. Their way of dealing with this is to say that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of the brain; consequently only those creatures containing a brain have consciousness. However, this is complete conjecture. It is as much a statement of faith as it is to say that a God exists in the sky. Scientists are equally unable to prove or disprove either statement, using the methods of knowing that they claim to be valid.

The real problem is: scientists holding the assumptions of scientism are extremely loath to question their blind belief that consciousness originates in the brain, as this would mean that the basis of all previous research would be challenged. It would be seen that the assumptions underpinning their work, for which there is no verifiable evidence, could be erroneous. Consequently, their current status as holding the only valid means of arriving at the 'truth' would be completely removed.

Guzeldere identifies two main usages of the term consciousness. There is the largely social aspect, which identifies knowledge shared by a community of people. It is used in this sense when talking about 'raising the consciousness of the working class', or 'consciousness raising groups for women'.

It is also used in a way which is largely psychological in nature.

This sense of consciousness can be subdivided into two meanings – either 'the state of faculty of being conscious, as a condition and concomitant of all thought, feeling and volition'; or 'the state of being conscious, regarded as the normal condition of healthy waking life'. (ibid: 34)

The first meaning implies that someone is conscious **of** something; the second suggests that consciousness is more basic than that, and allows for consideration of the possibility that it may be a necessary precondition to human life.

Stuart Sutherland gives the following description of consciousness in the *International Dictionary of Psychology*:

Consciousness: The having of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; awareness. The term is impossible to define except in terms that are unintelligible without a grasp of what consciousness means. Consciousness is a fascinating but elusive phenomenon: it is impossible to specify what it is, what it does, or why it evolved. (1989)

Dictionaries do not help in identifying what consciousness represents; there is a circularity of definition that leaves ultimate meaning unexplained. For example, in the Oxford English Dictionary, the word **consciousness** is defined as ‘the state or faculty of being *conscious*’; conscious is ‘having internal *perceptions* or consciousness’; perception is ‘to become *aware* of, conscious of; and **awareness** is ‘the quality or state of being aware; consciousness.

Closely linked to the idea of consciousness is that of the unconscious. English & English state:

It is said that there are no less than 39 distinct meanings of ‘unconscious’; it is certain that no author limits himself consistently to one. And nearly all meanings are closely linked to debatable theories. Any user of the term therefore risks suggesting agreement with theories he may deplore. (1958: 569)

I would suggest that it is because all we have are theories of consciousness, rather than provable descriptions of its origins and nature, that we cannot agree a definition either of consciousness, or of the unconscious. George Miller summarises the difficulty:

Consciousness is a word worn smooth by a million tongues. Depending upon the figure of speech chosen it is a state of being, a substance, a process, a place, an epiphenomenon, an emergent aspect of matter, or the only true reality’. (1962:25)

We only need to look at two of the possibilities that Miller mentions, – firstly, *consciousness as an epiphenomenon (that is, in this context, a by-product of brain activity)*; and secondly, *consciousness as the only true reality*, to realise that to agree a definition is extremely problematic. People’s understanding of consciousness – and in a similar way, of the unconscious, will be influenced by the world view they hold. If a materialist, then consciousness has to be explained as an emergence from matter; if not a materialist, then the options widen in terms of there being a range of possibilities as to the exact nature of the relationship between consciousness and matter, including a question mark over whether consciousness can exist independently of matter.

We are then brought full circle round to the current interest in a science of consciousness. So little is known of it either as a phenomenon or as an experience, that it does not seem currently possible to reach a consensus as to its meaning. However, in selecting the methods that we use to investigate it, it is important that we do not allow our unsupported preconceptions to limit our area of exploration.

The significance of consciousness

In the absence of any empirical evidence to guide me otherwise, I have personally made a commitment to being as open as possible as to the origins, nature and capacity of ‘consciousness’. Because an interest within my enquiry is the subjective experiences of consciousness (such as meaning, purpose, pain and suffering), and their relationship to external events, then I want the concept to be as all-embracing as possible. I will accept that, within my use of the term, I may be including aspects of reality that may be shown at some time in the future to have been created by the firing of neurons in the brain, and have no existence beyond. However, I have found by this stage of my enquiry that there is more evidence to support rather than negate my hypothesis that there is ‘more to life than meets the eye’, and that there is a wider reality to that which we experience with the five senses. Having examined critically and considered there to be sufficient evidence to provisionally reject both institutionalised religious dogmas, and scientific materialist dogmas, I now want to put full attention to investigating the development of a world view that values both the subjective and the objective, and that prioritises the value of living things. I want to develop a way of knowing that addresses, for example, what people can do to enhance their emotional and spiritual capacities to live loving, creative and meaningful lives.

I realise that there is an implicit assumption in what I am saying; that is, that it may be possible, and indeed desirable, to create a dynamic relationship between an objectively held ‘theory about the world’, and the kind of world we wish to create in terms of ‘what it feels like to be alive’. In other words, perhaps as a culture we have spent long enough setting as the main objective of research: “to discover the truth about the world, and aim to create a ‘theory of everything’ ”; which does not include anywhere within it the loving, creative qualities of a person’s inner life. Perhaps instead we can set as our objective ‘to create a world where all people live in ways that are in the best interests of the whole, and in so doing, experience love, peace, and a sense of fulfilment’.

Does this sound too unrealistic? Those living at the end of the 19th century would not have been able to envisage the world as it existed at the end of the 20th, given the advent of cars, aeroplanes, computers, and other forms of communication and technology. Perhaps if as much energy, commitment, political will and resources were to be put into achieving a transformation of our inner worlds as has been put into a transformation of the external world through technological research and advancement, then the state of affairs across our planet at this point in time might be very different.

What is the main block? I would suggest that it is all rooted in our understanding of consciousness. Everything we experience emerges out of consciousness; without consciousness, there is no scientific research, no technology; but also no thoughts, feelings and emotions. They all, although perceived differently, have that common source. Yet we have chosen to marginalise the reality of consciousness; we have seen no priority in developing an understanding of it. Consequently, we all have our different subjective experiences of consciousness. Apart from its intellectual dimensions, which are seen to be important, and are given due attention within the external arenas of education and business, any other element is generally perceived to be insignificant, certainly within public spheres. However chaotic, troubled, or depressed a person’s inner world, this is of no wider interest – until the external

behaviours emanating from these start to negatively impinge on other people; in which case the behaviour has to be managed and controlled.

However, if we pay serious attention to the inner experience of consciousness, and prioritise our understanding of the nature of the relationship between that, and what transpires in the external world, who knows what is possible? No serious, extensive and prolonged research has ever been undertaken into this. Unless we assume that there is potential in it, we will never try – and hence rule out the possibility without testing it.

It would seem to me that there is sufficient evidence, at the very least at an anecdotal level, to suggest that it is an area of enquiry worth formalised, collaborative and sustained effort. Throughout the ages, individuals have written about transpersonal experiences which they are certain represent a reality that exists independently of themselves. The basis of most spiritual traditions, prior to their institutionalisation, assume ‘other dimensions’ to the material.

At this stage of my enquiry, I have come to the conclusion that, if there is to be any hope of creating a sustainable world (which is experienced as meaningful, and is not pervaded by destructive events causing pain and suffering); if there is to be any hope of ensuring that the present ecological crisis is addressed, and that terrorism does not lead to global disaster; then we have to move our attention away from seeing knowledge purely in terms of ‘analysing and controlling the external world’. We have to prioritise gaining knowledge of consciousness as a subjective experience. Melodramatic it may sound; but unless we collectively make progress with this in the very near future, then it seems there is a high risk that the chaotic manifestations of our consciousness will continue to have widespread devastating consequences.

There are many voices saying something similar. There is also a feeling of helplessness; for as far as I can see, there is little if anything in the rhetoric of politicians, little if anything in the media, that recognises the need to develop an understanding and science of consciousness. From a cynical perspective, the priority of politicians is to retain their positions of power; the priority of the media is to attract an audience; and the vast majority of people in society, including politicians and journalists, make a choice between a traditional religious, or a scientific materialist world view. The influence of both continues to be deep and pervasive.

I cannot change the world. All I can do is take responsibility for myself, and hope that in so doing, I can have some influence. If I believe that what is required is a greater understanding of consciousness; and if the learning I have experienced to date supports rather than negates my hypothesis that there is a reality that exists beyond my brain, which my brain, given its current stage of development in the evolutionary process, has the capacity to sense, but not to fully comprehend; then I need to do what I can to gain information, (in a structured and verifiable way), that supports my view, in the hope that others will be sufficiently interested and convinced to work with me.

My developing hypothesis includes the provisional belief that, whatever intelligence exists in this ‘wider reality’, supports the process, and can provide guidance in my search for meaning. My sustaining subjective experience of a spiritual resilience that emerges from a sense of a loving dynamic energy; and my experience of synchronicities which provide evidence of an interconnected relationship between matter and psyche,

provide continuing confirmation of this hypothesis. From the time I was eighteen years of age, and realised that I thought in ways that were apparently somewhat ‘unusual’ compared to other eighteen years olds I met, I have always said to myself ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’. For the moment, I will stay with that rather crude metaphor. To date, it has only been myself who has judged whether what has emerged in the external world has justified my internal beliefs and thoughts. In writing this thesis, I am putting this up for the judgement of others.

In developing my use of the term ‘consciousness’, then, I want it to incorporate the possibility that any individual subjective experience, such as a vision or a state of mind, may reflect a reality that lies beyond the individual ‘brain’; and not to start with an assumption that a certain category of experience is bound to be illusory. I also want it to allow for the option that forms of being or intelligences are present that have an existence independent of material reality. Let me be clear that I am not categorically maintaining this is the case. I just want the research I undertake to include rather than exclude that as an option.

Clarifying my use of the term ‘consciousness’

In light of the preceding discussion, I now summarise my understanding and use of the term ‘consciousness’. I see it as containing all that I am aware of in this present moment, which includes external objects and events, and internal thoughts and feelings. I also believe that there may be things I am aware of, but not in this present moment – they may either be temporarily out of my mind, to be quickly recalled when some event triggers it; or it may be within the depths of my subconscious, which may not be so easily recalled. Finally, I use the word ‘consciousness’ to represent the possible source of all that is – the fundamental energy or intelligence that gives rise to all material manifestation. This I perceive as being the purely spiritual dimension of the universe.

I use the same word, as I see all ways in which consciousness is or expresses itself as being fundamentally the same ‘stuff’. The ocean, waves, sea-spray, and the liquid which remain in a moat round a sandcastle when the tide goes out, are all water, having the same origins – but we experience it differently, depending on contextual factors that influence its form of expression. If I were to specify the various expressions of consciousness as I have identified them above, I might use terms such as ‘awareness’, ‘subconscious’, ‘unconscious’, and ‘pure spirit’ – and indeed will do so on many occasions. However, I want to be clear, that if I do discriminate in this way, I am seeing consciousness not just as an aspect of human experience, but also as the primary ‘stuff’ from which the universe (hypothetically) emerges and has its being.

Every person has a unique experience of consciousness, the nature of which is influenced by a range of factors. For example, an individual’s experience of consciousness may be limited to events that occur within their immediate three-dimensional environment, within which they spend the whole or most of their lives. Alternatively, due to spending extensive time in many different environments, having the advantage of a quality education, and having the capacity to empathise and ‘live in the shoes’ of other people, some people may have a more expanded experience of consciousness. For those who experience lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences, or other altered states of consciousness, then the expansion continues. Having a felt

connection with a divine being, living with a sense of a transcendental presence, or having some other intimation of a spiritual reality which fuses through day-to-day living in the physical world, provides yet another dimension to an individual's consciousness within the present moment.

All of these, and more, comprise the content of people's experience of consciousness. One of the key questions that arises out of this is: "Which, if any, of these experiences represents or derives from a reality or a truth that exists beyond that of the individual; and which, if any, are no more than the chemical workings of the brain, and hence are fundamentally illusory in nature?"

These are fascinating questions. However, given that I am constrained by time, and only have a limited number of years to live (in this body anyway), then I have to prioritise how I spend that time. I would prefer to avoid using it on intellectual challenges alone, however interesting and stimulating, if they are unlikely to achieve what I would consider worthwhile ends. I would rather engage in activities that at least stand a chance of contributing towards the change I would like to see in the world. Consequently, I am only interested in aspects of a science of consciousness if they appear to help me develop a response to the questions that motivated me to initiate this enquiry at the beginning.

As a consequence of my enquiry to date, I have created the following premise, which although provisional and subject to change in response to further evidence, has developed as a consequence of my experience and learning to date:

My underlying assumption is that we are interconnected with each other and with the wider universe, so that the part influences the whole, and the whole influences the part. Everything each of us does influences, even if in a very minor way, every other part. We are also each connected to a spiritual (non-material) dimension that contains a memory of all that is and ever has been. We each have the capacity to access this through a range of methods, including meditation, reflection, contemplation, and journaling.

As I moved on with my enquiry, I was keen to test out the validity of this assumption; and if possible to do so in collaboration with others. I became highly motivated to seek out individuals who might be interested in engaging in this enquiry with me. The Scientific and Medical Network seemed to be the obvious place to connect with such people.

Chapter 11

Establishing the Need for an Inquiry Group

My exploration into the deep questions of meaning and purpose, pain and suffering, had largely been a solitary activity. Martin had recommended the support of a 'working group' in such enterprises. However, I had not previously encountered others who wished to collaboratively explore the nature and meaning of spiritual experiences in a context that was free from attachment to a specific religious group; and who were searching for ways to translate their spiritual beliefs and values into external action in the world. Then, the opportunity arose for me to research with others into the implications of this search.

My involvement with the Scientific and Medical Network undoubtedly made me aware of a wider range of intellectual pursuits taking place that, in terms of my search for explanations of the world that included spiritual and intuitive ways of knowing, were much needed.

However, my enquiry was never solely an intellectual one. From the outset, a primary motivation had been to see if I could discover a way of living where different aspects of my experience did not feel compartmentalised or in conflict. My ultimate aim was to feel more relaxed and at peace with myself. That did not seem an easy place to get to! However, my hope and optimism in life was such that I believed it should be possible. If I were able to achieve this, I was interested in discovering whether my experience and learning might have benefit for others. This had an intellectual dimension; but it was clearly a spiritual journey also.

Because I do not exist as an island, I knew this was not an enquiry I could properly undertake on my own; I needed to engage in it in partnership with others. Until joining the Network I never felt myself to be in a situation where I was potentially able to do so. There seemed to be too great a gap between what went on in my internal world, and what I generally heard others speak about. Historically, it was only through various writings that I had felt any sense of real connection with other people in relation to the deeper dimensions of life.

This changed when I joined the Network. I felt part of a community of people interested in the same kinds of ideas as myself. After a while, I felt that to further my personal enquiry, I needed to be able to participate with others in events where we could share all aspects of our experiences – which included feelings and emotions, as well as thoughts and ideas. Although this would happen to a certain extent in informal settings, it seemed to present problems in more formal meetings. This was particularly the case when key people responsible for the management of the Network were present. At times, I would initiate a conversation by sharing a personal experience which had a strong emotional component to it, and encourage others to do the same. For example,

on one occasion, there was discussion taking place as to whether “addiction was a symptom of spiritual hunger”. This was being spoken about as though it were to do with other people in other places. There was no suggestion that it might be an issue relevant to any of us. Even if it were, then it was part of our ‘private’ lives, and not appropriate to share in that forum. There seemed to be no sense that perhaps we might make greater progress in gaining an accurate and comprehensive response to the hypothesis if we were all prepared to consider it from our respective personal experiences. Feeling that there may indeed be some truth in a connection between addiction and spiritual hunger, I decided to talk about a problematic and addictive relationship I had with food when in my twenties. I had felt intuitively, even then, that this was a symptom of a deeper problem, which I had verbalised to myself as ‘unmet spiritual needs’; and that if I wanted to resolve the food addiction, I would need to deal with these other issues. One of the outcomes of the learning I gained through journaling was a gradual ending of the food difficulty. I had always been sure that the resolution was a positive external manifestation of my inner spiritual development.

Speaking of this in the formal group, my contribution was acknowledged – but politely and superficially. There was a quick return to more impersonal thoughts and ideas. I had known I was taking a risk introducing such an experience; and it did leave me feeling rather vulnerable. I was in an arena where to discuss theories, however radical, in an objective and unemotional way, was absolutely fine. However, to talk about ‘private’ matters, especially those that might socially be perceived as quite shameful, was not appropriate.

I could not understand this at all. Here was an organisation that based its ‘raison d’être’ on challenging traditional world views – challenging the separation of objective and subjective – and promoting the notion of a unified, participatory universe; and then individuals within it perpetuated a practice that dealt with issues as though they were ‘out there’, and had no relevance to how they understood and lived out their own lives on a daily basis.

For me, the value in the intellectual discussion was relative to the extent that it helped improve the quality of daily lived experience. This would only be possible to any great extent if there were opportunities to explore the relationship between the ideas, and what happened when they were applied in practice.

A number of experiences similar to that described led to my realising that formal meetings within the Network had little more to offer me. Intellectual ideas continued to develop within them; and to those who were satisfied with this, it offered a service. But in terms of organisational development, it stood still. It was not learning to live the ideas of which it spoke. Consequently, although I remained a member, I ceased attending Network events.

However, along the way, I had often met individuals who felt similarly to me. I realised that there were others who wanted to explore the implications of new ways of understanding the world for how they lived their lives; but were not quite sure what that meant in practice.

The other question that kept approaching me was: “How many people, like myself, think and feel at a deep level, but do so largely on their own; and what would happen if a group of people were able to connect and share at their deepest level with each other?”

I knew this would require great trust, and having to face the fear of taking the risk of disclosing inner thoughts and experiences. However, if I, with others, were able to achieve that, surely both the learning and the experiential value to each of us would be great.

One early action I initiated was to commence a ‘local group’ of Network members. On approximately a monthly basis, a group of people met for a day or an evening to explore issues of mutual interest. Group members in turn selected an area about which they had some knowledge or experience, and acted as ‘facilitator’ for a meeting. Subjects included ‘Living into Dying’, ‘Psychosis and Spirituality’, a discussion of the principles underpinning the Chinese Oracle ‘I Ching’, and the nature and value of a range of alternative healing therapies. On all occasions, individuals would share personal experiences of their own that contributed to a more profound understanding of the topic being discussed.

Those attending seemed to gain a tremendous amount from these meetings, and the quality of relationships that developed over time confirmed for me the value of people gathering together to explore the deeper aspects of experience. This gave me the confidence to put out a call out to a wider audience. I had an article published in the Network Journal, which included the following:

The Development of the Network

The Network has reached a significant stage in its development. Twenty-five years ago, it was created by a small group of scientists and doctors who questioned the materialistic explanations of life with which their training provided them, and which formed the basis of social existence within the western world. These individuals had become increasingly convinced that the world view they had been given was based on false assumptions, and that in fact the nature of reality was far more complex and exciting than it appeared.

The members of this small group were well ahead of their time in their thinking and forms of expression. They dared to question prevailing theories about the nature of the world, and to suggest that there was a spiritual basis to the universe which yearned to be recognised and made manifest in the external world. These people needed a ‘safe house’ where they could freely share their individual experiences of a benevolent power that was guiding them towards a realisation of an inner potential, the true nature of which they had only a dim awareness. They were sufficiently open to recognise the experience of synchronicities which brought them together in ways that enabled them to provide each other with much needed support in their challenging of conventional ideas, and in their exploration of a spiritually inspired understanding of life.

As time passed, an increasing number of people were invited to join the Network, as the need for a safe place to explore unconventional thinking was

required by greater numbers of people. Conferences and seminars were held, which explored the implications for traditional mainstream thinking of the ‘new’ sciences, complementary medicine, and our experience of consciousness.

In the past few years, the Network has been growing rapidly. There has been an increase in support of the principle that formed the basis of its origins – that is, that a spiritual dimension exists beyond our three dimensional world; and, to quote George Blaker, one of the Network’s founders:

“Without a transition from our evolving but materialistically based culture to a broader spiritually inspired understanding of the world and its inhabitants the new, just, fair, sustainable and peaceful world order that should succeed us could not become established”.

The possibility of a spiritual dimension is now much more widely accepted in our society than it was 25 years ago, and it is not quite so necessary to provide a ‘safe house’, entry to which is strictly monitored. However, in moving forward, the Network has to tread a narrow path. An asset can also be a difficulty. Many of those who proclaim the existence of a spiritual dimension are locked into a ‘New Age culture’, which indiscriminately accepts a wide range of supernatural entities and events, for which there is little or no evidential support. On the other hand, those who claim that nothing exists beyond the material remain closed to experiences which seem to challenge this view; or even if they are open to the experience, they are convinced that the explanation of such phenomena is rooted in the material world. This dichotomy reflects the historical antagonistic relationship between religion and science which has strong and powerful roots. It will take a transformation in thinking and experience to resolve the tension between the two.

The Relationship between Religion and Science

All religions acknowledge a spiritual dimension to life. However, they often also prescribe what is required of the individual in terms of beliefs and behaviour. Most religious institutions claim to ‘know’ the nature of the connection between a spiritual reality and the way in which human beings should live their lives. Those who hold positions of power are able to impose their ideas on others – and so the rigid and doctrinal tenets of different religious bodies arise and solidify. Individuals who stay within the formal religious organisation, but still retain their spontaneity and unique creativity, are generally those who can retain a connection with a core spiritual essence, and, either consciously or unconsciously, do not allow themselves to be limited and constrained by inflexible belief systems.

When an increasing number of people became aware that the world views dictated by the churches were shaped by the distorted views of fallible human beings, they sought to find a more objective way of understanding the world. Science provided such an approach. Any claims that it made could be either proven or disproved. People flocked to a discipline which seemed to be grounded in a reality they could understand, and did not assume a reality beyond the physical world.

And so the pendulum swung in the other direction. The western world developed an interpretation of the world which suggested that, unless you could prove an event through use of the five senses, then your experience was a result of your imagination or wishful thinking, and was not to be valued. A spiritual dimension, because it was intangible, was not a possibility.

This situation is again changing. Increasingly many people are becoming disillusioned with the alienation that results from living in a society governed by a predominantly materialistic view of life. There seems to be considerable evidence of a spiritual dimension – though not much evidence as that word is used in traditional science. However, many are fearful of a return to religious systems that promote inflexible and doctrinal approaches. They are looking for ways of understanding the world, and of living in it, that give value to each individual's own internal authority within the world's interconnected fabric—for paths that reflect their unique experience and learning. How is it possible to explore the nature and reality of a spiritual universe whilst retaining the rigour and systematic methods of investigation that have proven so successful in science?

I indicated that I was interested in bringing together a group of people who were attracted to the idea of an exploration of this nature. In so doing, I wanted the methods of discovery and learning we used to reflect the principles of the new world view we would be exploring.

Learning involves managing the relationship between the external world (objective conditions) and the individual (subjective experience). Experiential learning theory recognises and equally values internal, subjective experiences, and external, environmental 'objective' reality. It advocates that the two interpenetrate and interrelate in subtle and complex ways – and that, through the relationship, both change. Learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms. (Adapted from Kolb 1993)

After the article was published, I had an immediate response from a number of people, all expressing a level of enthusiasm to continue. At an early stage, a few of us came together, to develop a collaborative understanding of what we felt the common ground to be. A short paper was written, which included the following:

Those of us so far engaged in this process agree that:

1. We sense we are part of an all-embracing Unity – a Unity that evolves from within, and cannot be created by manipulating the external world.
2. We find that, when we start to follow the inner path, we paradoxically find ourselves making stronger and more real connections with other people, and realise we are not alone on this journey.

3. We experience a spiritual hunger – but want to be discriminating in terms of what we choose to feed that hunger. We know that much of what looks externally attractive, and may even initially taste sweet, may have no substance. We need to apply critical judgement to learn what is appropriate to satisfy our hunger. That indeed may be different things for different people. What we can collectively do, however, is share in the ‘learning’ process – perhaps identify principles that appear to be common for all. But ultimately, each of us needs to develop a form of nourishment, a way of living, that is appropriate for our own unique being.

We would like to work with others who accept there is a spiritual reality that exists beyond the three dimensional material existence – or are, at the very least, open to the possibility, and wish to explore it more fully; *and who* are committed to using systematic and structured methods for translating the understanding to be gained from that spiritual reality into action that aims to create a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

This is an opportunity for everyone interested in this process to explore the implications for how they live their lives, and possible changes they might make to their lives. There is a recognition that we are all operating within a context that has been shaped by limited beliefs, which in turn may have led us into having a limited experience of life. However, if we are to make changes and explore our full potential, we want to make sure that what we do is grounded in valid information, and we are not blown about by popular ‘fashion of the era’ views.

There is a recognition that any outcomes or conclusions that are reached either individually or collectively at any stage of this process should be ‘held lightly’, and remain open to modification resulting from future experience.

We wish to involve and engage the whole person – emotional, spiritual, intuitive, intellectual, social and physical. We seek to be involved in a process of transformative education – but understand that, if the world is to change, then transformation must start with me.

Due to the response generated from these writings, and with the support of others keen to engage with the process, I arranged a residential weekend in Wales, to explore how we may take this initiative further. Over twenty people participated – a diverse group, but all comfortable with the word ‘spiritual’, and all keen to collaboratively explore what the nature and significance of a ‘spiritual reality’ might be.

Consequently, one of the sessions during the weekend was a dialogue on ‘What do we understand by spirituality?’ However, the process did not run smoothly, and there was no consensus arising at the end. Rather, there was an acknowledgement that more work needed to be done in this area. Any assumption that we were agreed about what we understood by ‘spirituality’ was clearly misplaced. The core difference seemed to be between those who saw spirituality as being represented by a hierarchical model of the self – so that one aimed to attain one’s ‘higher self’ –

that is, an elevated state of being. Others considered this represented too closely the hierarchical model in which our materialistic society was based, and wanted a model that did not seem to imply superior and inferior ways of being.

One person summarised their perception of the situation by saying:

“Spirituality is the common basis which has brought us together. But what exactly do we mean by it? The spirituality of, say, the Pope and that of a Siberian shaman ARE different, as are the concepts of god held by, say, the Jews (Yahweh) and the Hindus (Brahma). You can't use the word 'spirituality' without inferring something of a belief system. What will it mean for us? I'm not suggesting that we need to strive to find some kind of common creed; that would probably be impossible, and perhaps, because we see ourselves in a dynamic process, undesirable too. But I do think we need to try to discover where we each and all stand, so as to know what common ground we share upon which we might build this project. I think we need to examine our assumptions in the area of spirituality.”

It was then suggested that perhaps we could each share a spiritual experience that had been meaningful to us. This session was much more productive. Somehow, there was an acceptance of another person's experience where there had not necessarily been an acceptance of their definition. By the time the last person had spoken, there was a tangible sense of warmth and connection within the group; quite different from the tension that had been created by the previous discussion.

There was great learning in this for me. I realised that we each felt we had gained from the sharing of stories; whereas we felt we had achieved nothing substantive from our attempt to analyse and 'pin down' the meaning of spirituality as a conceptual term. This was the first time I became consciously aware of something that I was to encounter many times in the future: that is, that communicating experience through the form of story telling expanded and enriched the learning both for the teller and the listener; whereas dissecting language was felt to be reductive, and was only useful in certain specialised contexts. It seemed that listening to each other's experiences contributed to our development on a range of levels, including the spiritual and emotional.

Considerable discussion followed as to whether we could agree a group 'vision'. There were two main strands coming through on a consistent basis. One was what individuals wished to achieve for themselves in terms of change and development; the other was what they desired to see happen on a global level. There was recognition that the two were not in fact unconnected. From this emerged a consensus that an appropriate vision would be:

‘Transforming the world through transforming self’

A number of people expressed an interest in becoming part of an inquiry which would begin to map out what transformation might mean in terms of individual experiences and / or practices; what impact such experiences might have on the development of subsequent relationships, both personal and professional; what impact that might have for global change; and the potential implications for visionary statements of the future, such as ‘the transformation of planetary consciousness’.

A specific question then emerged: *‘What would engaging in a more transformative way of living actually mean in practice?’*

Following further discussion, a proposal was put together as follows:

To establish a collaborative inquiry into how we progress with realising our vision of ‘transforming the world through transforming self’, with a specific focus (at least initially) on what is involved in ‘transforming self’. The contention is that ultimately, the only person I am able to transform is myself - and consequently, the only way the world will be transformed is by a critical mass of people taking responsibility for their own personal transformation.

This connected with an article in a Review of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, published in America, which was talking about a growing interest in exploring the interface between consciousness and action, and the need to develop a community which learns how to link personal and societal transformation. It said:

“Plans for the future involve inquiry into ‘the transformation of consciousness’, asking how we might ‘awaken’ or ‘develop’ consciousness through attentional and intentional training – to enhance our capacity for empathy, compassion, and love, and our ability to experience ourselves as part of a larger whole.”
.....A growing number of people from all walks of life are interested in learning about consciousness, participating through personal inquiry into the exploration of consciousness, and in applying the result of what they have learned to daily life.” (Franklin, 2000)

Group members found this article provided a valuable pointer to the underlying direction in which they wished to progress. One person stated:

“We want to begin to identify the effects of transformational processes on consciousness, effects on action in the wider world, changes to relationships with others, changes to the inner relationship with oneself, that may arise out of shifts in consciousness that we associate with the word ‘transformation’.”

Another person interpreted their understanding of what a major issue was as follows:

“We have done damage by creating splits between ideas and personal development; we should be aiming to understand and repair this damage. Society does not encourage the integration of the development of ideas and personal development. This issue needs more thought and debate. If we are not to be limited to conversations 'about these things' without experiential direct involvement in trying them out, it is going to involve individuals in the sorts of personal transformations that take place in change, healing, and growth. Any growth in consciousness involves struggle and adjustment before one feels comfortable with the newly acquired world-view that results. It seems that we are explicitly aiming to educate in areas of consciousness itself. This in turn will require individuals to take risks, the outcome of which for some at some stages will be difficult, and they will need support in understanding and handling their experiences.”

Having read a considerable amount about John Heron and Peter Reason’s methodology of ‘co-operative inquiry’, I suggested that we could use this as a framework for pursuing our questions. Very few people present were familiar with

the concept of co-operative inquiry. Hence, the agreement was that we arrange a further weekend to explore this as a possibility. In the meantime, I should circulate information about co-operative inquiry to group members, and provide a framework for the following meeting.

The following chapter summarises the development of that group, and how I struggled to find a way to express the learning I gained from being part of it.

Chapter 12

The Transformative Living Inquiry Group

When I initially completed Part 1 of this thesis, I included three chapters on writing up what I and my co-inquirers called a 'co-operative inquiry' group (see Appendix 1). However, as a result of feedback from others, I realised that I would have to review it from a different perspective. This brief chapter tells how that came to happen.

A more detailed account of the rich learning gained from the group experience, and the implications of this for developing my way of knowing is included in Part 2, Chapter 19.

Introduction

When I first read Martin's *Experiment in Depth*, I was conscious of his recommendation that:

From the outset anyone undertaking the experiment in depth is well advised to do everything in his power to bring into operation two great integrative factors: the fellowship of a working group; and the contact with the deep centre.
(1955/1999: 236)

I included this quotation earlier in my thesis (Chapter 3), and stated that one of the main reasons for not being able to gain the 'fellowship of a working group' was because I knew of no-one whom I could ask to be part of this group. I felt very isolated; and at a fundamental level questioned how 'normal' it was to reflect at the depth and intensity that I did.

Now, however, through a process of engaging with others in the Network, and writing an article that expressed my perspective and interests, I was, for the first time, in the position of (potentially) being able to form a working group. I say 'potentially', because I really was feeling my way hesitatingly and uncertainly. I was not sure where this process was going; I was following some deep indefinable(what word to put in here – 'voice', 'instinct', 'pull' – the difficulties of language – none of these quite describe what I was feeling – but the feeling whatever it was, was powerful enough to lead me to take action, even though I did not know where it was taking me)

The difficulty of putting experience into words (either verbally or in writing) has been the greatest defining characteristic of the group as it has formed, developed, and evolved throughout its existence. This difficulty creates a real problem when writing about it in a thesis, which is so dependent on the written word as a means of communicating meaning and learning. It seems to me to be an almost insurmountable challenge to communicate in propositional form the quality and nature of experience that is as deep and intangible as the experience of the group members has been.

When the group first met, the intention was that it should run as a ‘Co-operative Inquiry’ (CI), using Heron’s model of inquiry (1996) as the framework to guide what we did. We spent some time as a group looking at what CI was, and the initial planning was undertaken in relation to CI principles. Indeed, when writing the first draft of this thesis, I wrote an extended account and evaluation of the group experience, in the light of perceiving it as a ‘co-operative inquiry’ (Appendix 1).

However, when I sent the draft thesis out to ‘critical friends’ to comment on, the point that was made by all of them was that the sections on CI did not integrate with the rest of the writing. Firstly, my writing style changed; I moved away from a first person narrative account into a third person analytical report. Secondly, in my evaluation, it was felt that I was rather artificially framing it within a CI context. Although we had had the intention of engaging in CI, in fact we had radically deviated away from some of its defining principles; and finally, though the process was felt by group members to be of great value, what we experienced could not justifiably be represented as CI, in the sense that Heron and Reason have developed it.

I take each of these points in turn, and critically analyse my original writings in the light of the comments made.

1. My writing style changed: I moved away from a first person narrative account into a third person analytical report.

Although I had been interested in co-operative inquiry as a form of research for some time, I had not previously initiated one. I enlisted the support of Bryce Taylor, a long-term colleague of John Heron, who had considerable experience of CI. Bryce agreed to be a co-initiator of the process with me.

In the early stages, he took the lead role in explaining to others what the principles of CI were. He introduced concepts such as Apollonian and Dionysian forms of inquiry, devil’s advocate, and validity procedures. We were undertaking a formal inquiry; and I felt I should formally record it. Consequently, I included less of a first person narrative account, and tended more towards an objective, almost ‘reporting’ style.

For example, I wrote as follows:

Although it was planned that the co-operative inquiry should only run for a year, in fact it continued over a three year period, with five weekends taking place between October 2001 – July 2002, and a further three from October 2002 – July 2003. A follow-up meeting took place in January 2004.

I would summarise my understanding of what happened during the three years as follows:

In Year 1, there was considerable chaos, confusion, and emotional disturbance, as people not only got to know each other, but became familiar with what was involved in the co-operative inquiry process. During that time, three people left the group for very different reasons. Group members generally felt that slow progress was being made; and by the end of the fifth meeting, only one complete cycle of the research process had been completed.

In Year 2, the group consolidated. Although there were some interpersonal challenges and conflicts, in general these were dealt with constructively and seemed to eventually help the group move on, rather than impede progress. There was a deepening of relationship, and there appeared to emerge a more expanded understanding of the transformative process.

In Year 3, it felt to me at the time as though the inquiry had in essence ceased, and people were content to just 'be' together', feeling that there was considerable value to be gained from this. So although the formal cyclical process of co-operative inquiry was not continuing, it seemed that just experiencing being part of the group supported at least some people in continuing the process of learning and transformation outside of the group.

The feedback I received suggested that, through taking on this more objective writing style in relation to an experience that was subjectively very significant for all involved, I was inadequately communicating the power and excitement of the process.

2. In my evaluation, it was felt that I was rather artificially framing it within a CI context. Although we had the intention of engaging in CI, we had radically deviated away from some of its defining principles.

The one principle that the group consciously adopted was the cyclical process of determining the focus of inquiry, identifying questions which arose out of the inquiry focus, engaging with those questions in daily life, then returning to the group, and sharing respective learning and experience with other group members. After having had the opportunity to discuss and reflect within the group, and develop or change the questions, there would be a return to the wider world to continue the exploration.

This cyclical process formed a disciplined structure for the first two years of the group; and in this sense, we all felt we were engaged in co-operative inquiry. I

was aware that we were not paying as much attention to issues such as reporting and taking the role of devil's advocate as we might; but I was experiencing a development and deepening within the group which I felt to be of value; and I did not want to take too much responsibility for guiding its direction.

When I came to write up the account of the three years the group had been meeting, and studied Heron's writing in depth (1996, 1998), I realised just how little attention we had paid to concepts such as "convergence and divergence", "authentic collaboration", and "challenging critical subjectivity." Nevertheless, throughout this time, we had been calling ourselves either the Co-operative Inquiry Group, or alternatively, the Transformative Living Inquiry Group; and we had completely accepted that we were undertaking a 'co-operative inquiry'. Indeed we were: but a version of our own, rather than John Heron's model.

Nevertheless, I decided that I would return to Heron's concepts, and evaluate our experience in the light of these, whilst acknowledging "how little the process had been informed by conceptual frameworks". The artificial nature of the evaluation was all too clear to the reader, however; the critical comments made their presence felt.

3. Though the process was felt by group members to be of great value, what we experienced could not justifiably be represented as CI. I would need to find another form of representation.

I realised that I would have to re-think how I was going to reflect the experience and learning of the group. It was important to me to find a way, as it was clear that, after a very difficult first year, those members who remained had undoubtedly gained a huge amount from participating in the process. One of the qualities that everyone agreed had been invaluable was the depth of listening, and the 'safe space' to share at a profound level. For me, my involvement had helped me gain confidence that the deep searching I had been doing on my own was a meaningful activity; and there were others who would join with me in my pursuit of a way of knowing that satisfied my search for meaning. However, evaluating the inquiry in the way I initially did, did not work for me, nor for my readers; we did not consider it did justice to what had been experienced. The challenge for me was how I could remedy this, and present an account that communicated the nature and impact of the enquiry process more expressively to the reader.

A number of people suggested that I should write about the group as a continuation of my own narrative inquiry, introducing the voices of others as part of that process. Although I agreed, I could not immediately find a satisfactory means of achieving this. Whilst I reflected on how to tell the story of a collaborative inquiry in which a core element had been the sharing of our individual stories, I realised that the idea of 'story' was central to my enquiry; and I wanted to explore story-telling as a method of research in its own right. The next chapter gives an account of that exploration.

Chapter 13

Story-Telling as Research

In the unfolding of this thesis, I have been telling a first person story of the development of my personal enquiry grounded in life events. As the story records the dynamic and dialogical relationship between the questions being asked, and the life that is lived in response to those questions, the process can be seen to be one of research and knowledge creation, as my emergent methodology includes both narrative inquiry and action research.

As I write these words in August 2004, it is almost exactly 34 years since I started work in the children's home – the formal starting point of this enquiry. When I registered to do a PhD, my motivation was to find a means to structure and write up the learning that I felt I had gained through my adult years. I had throughout used action research as a means of developing a relationship between ideas and action. In my early twenties, I had used a form of this implicitly and intuitively; then in my social work training, this methodology was 'named', when I discovered models of experiential learning, in which learners were encouraged to relate the theories they were being given to their personal lived experience. The experiential learning cycle - concrete experience, observations and reflections, formation of abstract concepts and generalizations, testing new implications of concepts in new situations, leading back into concrete experience.....(Kolb 1993: 139) was translated into a systematic form of research, incorporating action and reflection, such that one actively informed the other. Perhaps because of the nature of the core questions that had been prompted during those early years in residential child care, and the fact that the rest of my life continued to develop as a response to those questions, a form of action research was inevitable. In a very real sense, I felt that my life was my inquiry, and out of my enquiry, the form of my life emerged.

Judi Marshall talks of the relationship between research and life development:

I believe that much research is personal process, that people study topics that are relevant to them and do so through inquiry methods which are significant in some way. My own researching has been a process of life development. This personal involvement is not a burden, a source of unwanted bias; rather it provides the energy for research and heightens my potential as a sense-maker. (1992: 279)

However, I struggled to find an appropriate means for articulating the learning. The knowledge I was generating often felt chaotic and confusing; I was unable to easily develop a framework within which I could make sense of it all. In the main, this was because I could not see how the outcomes of my search for knowledge could be produced as a complete package, separate from the experiences that had influenced my ideas and thinking. My questions were to do with psychological and spiritual states of

being. Unlike the person who seeks to create an even smaller computer than the latest model, there was not a moment when I could say that I had ‘done it’; so could now write up the mechanisms by which that was accomplished. Indeed, it was not even potentially possible for any one person to achieve that in relation to the kind of issues I was exploring, as they were dependent on the attitudes and behaviour of many people; it was beyond the control of a single individual to find ‘the answer’.

The only means I could think of to enable me to communicate all aspects of my experience as an integrated package, without artificially separating the ideas from the lived experience, was to tell my story – the unfolding story of the dynamic interaction between thoughts, feelings, emotions, desires, actions, and events in the external world, all of which merged in each present moment to result in a kaleidoscope of ‘now’. At intervals I would wonder how I was going to fully justify this story telling, incorporating a number of very personal experiences, as a method of research within the academy; but would put that question on hold for later consideration.

It was only when I came to the final writing up of this part of the thesis that I began to reflect on the notion that a metaphor of ‘story’ might be a much more powerful and pervasive one than I had so far considered. This idea was activated when I was reading John Heron’s proposal for a ‘participatory theology’ (1998: Ch.22). Heron is seeking to communicate his ideas concerning ‘the flowering of the Many on the ground of the One’, and his view that ‘divine being’ is the totality of all that is. Divine being includes (using my language), both the material and the spiritual; and is (using Heron’s language) “immanent in all manifestation as spiritual life; and transcends it as spiritual consciousness.” (ibid: 246)

He considers how human beings can live as an integral aspect of this ‘ultimate unity’, yet be unaware of the whole in which they are a part, then states:

The analogue is the creative novelist who generates images of people whose destinies and characters unfold within the total field of his or her imagination.....The persons in the story are entirely included in the writer’s imagination, yet can be conceived as having no aware internal dialogue with the author at all: their conscious process is entirely contained within the parameters of character and plot devised by the writer. Equally, it is possible for the writer to imagine people who, within these limits, turn about to dialogue with their author about the state of being and their fate. (ibid: 247)

Thus, if people become too identified with ‘illusory, egoic and contracted states’, they will not be able to see that they are part of a larger story, and that they can never be separated from it. However, if individuals become aware of their interconnected role in the totality, they are not only conscious of the active role they play in the unfolding of the whole story; but indeed they can enter into dialogue with the author, and begin to play an active role in shaping how the story progresses. Human beings can choose to be unconscious players, who passively allow their experience to be shaped by others; or they can become proactive co-creators in the developing narrative.

This was so much in accord with my experience of the nature of the fundamental choices I was faced with at every stage of my life (do I allow my life to be shaped by the beliefs and edicts of others; or do I create my own account of my life?), that I began

to ponder on the significance of ‘story’. Was it possible that this could provide me with an ontology, epistemology and methodology which made sense of my own experience?

I then proceeded to develop Heron’s analogy, incorporating my experiential and theoretical sense of how the universe worked. I had for a long time been comfortable with the idea of there being an ultimate intelligence with infinite existence, from which all forms of creation had emerged. However, I had ongoing difficulties in communicating, even to myself, a way of articulating my sense of reciprocity between myself and this intelligence; and of justifying why I felt so sure that the ultimate intelligence, though so much ‘greater’ than myself, was not separate, and was **not** controlling and judgemental; but instead desired for us to live entrepreneurial and creative lives, finding our own forms of expression and ways of ‘being in the world’. The only proviso is to recognise that we should live in recognition that we are a part of a whole, and see as indivisible our own interests from those of the wider universe.

So, I reflected, what if I use story as an explanatory metaphor for an ontology which sees reality as a participatory process where mind and matter interpenetrate and shape each other? What emerges if I view my notion of an ultimate intelligence as an ‘author’, out of whose imagination is created material forms, including (at minimum) the universe we inhabit? As living beings, we too can see ourselves as having been created out of this intelligence, as characters in the living narrative. However, the process does not stop there. As a materialisation from the author’s imagination, we contain that imagination; and are able to use it to play an active part in the development of the story. Thus, we are not passive pawns in an already written drama; rather we have the capacity to reflect and create in ways which mirror those of the author responsible for us. How far can the process go? Who knows. Perhaps it is like a hall of receding mirrors, where there is potentially no end. My imagination creates another being with imagination, who createsIndeed, a version of this happens through procreation; I and another are responsible for the birth of a new imaginative being in this world.

This way of perceiving the world helps me make sense of all of my experience to date. A central aspect is the nature of the author that is the initiating creator. In many religions, this author is known as ‘God’, and is responsible for all. My difficulties with this ‘God’ which I had identified through the years can be summarized as follows:

- Although present in all aspects of creation, He is essentially separate from it, and could control it at will.
- According to some interpretations, He chooses to give us free will – but that freedom could be taken away from us at any point in time.
- We play no real part in the creative unfolding of the universe. We are essentially ‘subjects’, who are required to learn and obey the laws that this separated ‘God’ has given us.
- Our future beyond death depends on how well we have obeyed those laws.

This view reflects the dualism that I identified as being problematic in chapter 5. The power in Heron’s analogy is that the author, imagination, characters and ‘action in the world’ are ultimately a unity, and cannot be divided. Everything emerges from the imagination of the author, and does not have an existence separate from it.

Looking at it from this perspective, what joy is there in it for the author if the characters are controlled, and are not able to develop as fully as possible? Why should any author want such a ‘managed’ story?

It may be helpful here to look at what stories really work in our human world. Two recent and very successful children’s authors, who have also attracted much attention from adults, are J.K. Rowling, creator of Harry Potter, and Philip Pullman, author of the trilogy ‘His Dark Materials’. Both writers find it difficult to account for how they are able to write so fluently; both, like many other creative people, state that the words flow through them, rather than feel that they as individuals are responsible for ‘making it happen’; (is this their imagination interacting with the imagination of the initiating author in some kind of way?) The central characters in both sets of stories live in magical worlds, where unusual things happen as a normal part of daily living. In other words, a major part of the story telling is the imagination of the authors, which envisages the possibility of a universe far more exciting and full of opportunities than seem realistic in most people’s everyday experience of this world. But perhaps these stories are not just providing readers with illusory escapism, as some might suggest. They may instead be connecting with a part of us which knows that, if we were more open to possibilities, more exciting opportunities might arise for us in this world also. From my exploration and experience of synchronicity, for example, I was aware that theoretical explanations for apparently miraculous happenings were in existence. However, our culture perpetuates a mindset that is not conducive to such events.

About two years ago, I went to listen to Philip Pullman speak about his story telling. As an English teacher in an Oxford school, he said something that would not have pleased promoters of the National Curriculum; but certainly pleased the children who were listening to him. He stated that for GCSE English, children were encouraged to firstly plan and create a structure for what they were going to write. After they had done this, they were told to write their essay according to the structure. Pullman recommended they should turn this on its head. They should choose a title that appealed to their imagination, then write their story freely and spontaneously, just as it came to mind. At the end, in order to please the examiners, they should look at what they had written, and draw up a plan that fitted their creation!

The main point he was making was that he did not consider the best stories could be told when they were planned and ‘controlled’ in this way. He stated directly that he would never have written any book, had he been forced to follow this strategy – and certainly not ones that were as successful as his trilogy. The truly interesting and rewarding story to write was where one allowed one’s imagination free reign, and allowed what was in it to emerge.

Interestingly, in terms of the areas focused on in this thesis, Pullman, who is a self-confessed atheist, includes an attack on religion in *His Dark Materials*; and many of the ideas underlying his story derive from quantum physics. In an interview printed in the Times, Celia Dodd says:

Intriguingly, Pullman’s version of dark matter – he calls it ‘Dust’ – is the equivalent of human consciousness. He explains “I’ve taken a leap beyond anything that science justifies – I don’t think any scientist has ever come up with the idea that dark matter is conscious! Dust is all the wisdom and consciousness of the world, which has somehow become externalised. You

could even say it's an atheist's God. But it's a mutually dependent thing: to make sure Dust doesn't vanish we have to contribute to wisdom as well as leech from it. (The Times, Saturday 8 May 2004)

It does, however, seem that in his atheism, he is referring to institutionalised dualistic religion; and in his idea of an 'atheist's God', human consciousness is the manifestation of all the wisdom and consciousness of the world, to which humans need to add to, and not just take from. This seems essentially very similar to the view of the world being developed here.

In a joint interview with Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, Pullman is asked how, in a materialist society, he would recommend children develop a spiritual life. Pullman responded:

I don't use the word spiritual myself, because I don't have a clear sense of what it means. But I think it depends on your view of education: if you believe in setting children's minds alive and ablaze with excitement and passion or whether it's a matter of filling them with facts and testing on them. I know which one I'd go for. (The Daily Telegraph, Wednesday 17 March 2004)

Would not any 'author' of the story of the universe not also have an interest in a creation which was dynamic and flourishing, and where minds 'were alive and ablaze with excitement and passion'; rather than being in control of robotic players who were instructed to learn and follow a set of pre-ordained rules?

Using imagery that contains an integration of initiating author, imagination, characters and unfolding story, also makes sense within the world described by modern science. Quantum physics has revealed that there is no reality independent of the researcher, as the questions asked, and the way in which the world is observed, influences what transpires. An action taken by any part of the whole affects the totality of that whole. What the characters do in the unfolding story shapes the imagination of the author; and so the process continues to evolve.

If I accept an ontology that affirms reality as an unfolding story initiated by a primary intelligence, where the primary intelligence, its imagination as to what is possible, the phenomenal world that emerges out of that imagination, and the events, interactions and relationships that transpire and feed back into the phenomena, imagination and intelligence; then Heron's epistemology within his participatory paradigm would fit well:

This participative paradigm (has an epistemic wing which is informed by) an epistemology that asserts the participative relation between the knower and the known (*author and story*), and where the known is also a knower, between knower and knower (*author and characters in relationship and dialogue*). Knower and known are not separate in this interactive relation. (1996:11)

If the metaphor of story provides an ontology and epistemology, can it also provide a methodology? Is the telling of individual stories an appropriate form of research?

Given that this was the method I have gravitated towards in my own research; and also it was the method most commonly used, though not consciously chosen, by the

Transformative Living Inquiry Group, I decided to explore this more. I knew that I had read material on the role of story in research; but had not been sufficiently interested to pay it much attention. As part of my investigation into what existed in that sphere, I did a search on my computer for all documents that included the word 'story'. There were many; but the one that was most relevant to what I was seeking was a paper by Paul Wilkins, entitled *Story-Telling as Research*.

Now let me break into this part of the narrative to tell of a 'sub-plot'. I found myself faced with a choice at this point. (Are we not all at every point in our lives? Does an understanding of the basis of those choices, and the rationale we use for making them, not lie at the heart of what I am enquiring about?) My choice was: do I talk about the content and relevance of Wilkin's article in objective third person terms, as though he occupied the same status as most other writers whom I quote – that is, are known to me only through their writings? Or do I include an account of our personal history, including the means by which I received this article? Of course, in the traditional academic world, this would not be seen as a choice. Obviously the personal is not relevant! But I am challenging the traditional methods of research, as a dimension of challenging the traditional positivist world view. Furthermore, in inserting this personal account, I am providing experiential support for a number of propositions detailed in this thesis. Firstly, it is a further experience of synchronicity; and on this occasion is one that is directly connected to the writing of this thesis. Secondly, the principle of interconnection: In Chapter 7, I described the Aspect experiment in quantum physics, which suggests that when there has been a connection, a 'unity', then that unity is split in two, there continues to be correlation such that a change in one is reflected in the behaviour of the other. Thirdly, I am currently exploring the use of story as a means of understanding the world, and researching it. The following story has the concept of 'story' at its heart; and as such, I feel is worth the telling as a sub-plot to the main drama.

Paul Wilkins was a central part of my life at the outset of this enquiry. We met on my first day of working at the children's home; he was a friend of Tess, the 'housemother'. We started a relationship a week later, which lasted for over three years.

Paul at that time was an undergraduate student studying Biology at Imperial College in London. We visited each other on a regular basis. Although I did not acknowledge this in my original account of my time at the children's home - (what we miss out of our story telling may be as significant as what we include!), it was my relationship with Paul which I saw, both at the time, and in retrospect, as my 'life-line'. I am sure that if he had not been there, my depression would have been far more serious, with outcomes that can of course only be speculative. However, despite my closeness to Paul, I did not feel able at that time to share the true extent of the distress I was feeling. He was aware of some of it; he too experienced at first hand times of great disturbance with the young people. But the support he gave me was through the nature of the relationship; not through his conscious awareness and support of what I was going through.

The relationship ended after my first year at University. In a way that many people find difficult to believe, but which is true, we were both at Bangor University during that first year, by 'chance'. However that chance occurred, it was certainly not through our deliberate, or even desired, planning. He was doing a masters degree in ecology, I was undertaking a first degree in the social sciences and social work. By that time, I had

become very involved with the ideas of Jung, Martin's *'An Experiment in Depth'*, and journaling. Paul knew none of this. As far as I was concerned, we were two different people, with different academic interests, living in different worlds. We separated; there seemed nothing to keep us together.

We were not in contact for some considerable time, and I did not know what was happening to him.

Several years later, after my daughter was born, contact between us was renewed. We were interested in finding out what had happened to each other in the intervening period. We had both experienced difficult times. By that time, I had undertaken social work training, spent several years in professional social work practice, then as a social work lecturer and tutor, and was now self-employed. Paul had in the meantime gained employment in his sphere of ecology; but after a period of time as a volunteer with the Samaritans, had undertaken a full time counselling course, and had moved into social work within the mental health field. We commented on the fact that it was 'odd' that his path had taken him into a similar professional sphere to mine.

Our contact continued, but was occasional and limited. I was aware that he had become a lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University. However, it was only when I started a PhD at Bath University that I discovered he had become interested in co-operative inquiry, and was making that the core of much of his teaching work, to the extent that he had had several articles written and published about it. We met again, and realised that our shared philosophy and interests, although coming from a different source (his core professional specialism was in person-centred counselling), had much in common. He too had been influenced by the writings of Peter Reason and John Heron.

As a consequence of this meeting, Paul sent me a number of the articles he had written. Some of them, written about his experiences in co-operative inquiry, I was interested in; the chapter of a book entitled 'Story-Telling as Research' passed me by.

This was the paper that was retrieved through the computer search. On reading it, as a consequence of the 'revelation' I had experienced after encountering John Heron's analogy, I realised that there was much within it that was relevant to the current stage of my enquiry. So it is with thanks to Paul Wilkins, and with acknowledgement of the synchronicities and interconnections which abound in the universe, that I return to the main plot.

Wilkin's primary thesis in this chapter is that stories are central to people's lives; it is the means by which they make sense of their experience, and communicate it to others.

There are many reasons to believe that story-telling and metaphor is the ordinary language of ordinary people, a universal mode of communication understood in some way (however deeply or shallowly) by both teller and listener. Because they are a natural form of expression, it makes sense to use them in any investigation of human experience; as a means of inquiry, as a way of processing data and as a way of presenting findings.

With the possible exception of the use of narrative analysis (see Reissman, 1993; Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994) as a method of handling (for example) interview data, this is rarely done. Instead, research methodology

and the presentation of findings privileges the language of an academic elite and still tends to favour a positivistic paradigm and to ignore the creative expression which is everyday dialogue. (2000:144)

Wilkins accounts for this by suggesting that forms of expression arising out of imagination and intuition are not valued in a world where positivist methods of research are more interested in quantities than in qualities. Even in qualitative research, social scientists “have tended to use what Reason and Rowan (1981) refer to as ‘old paradigm’ research”. However, this is not necessarily the most appropriate basis for understanding human experience. Encouraging people to tell stories of their experience is more likely to produce an account that is meaningful to those who have shared the experience; it can also be accessible to a wider range of readers than traditional research reports; and hence the learning contained within them is likely to be more widely disseminated.

Wilkins quotes Reason and Hawkins (1998, pp.79-101), who consider how “stories and storytelling might be part of an emergent paradigm of inquiry.” Of this paradigm, they write:

It tends to be co-operative rather than unilateral; to be qualitative rather than quantitative; to be holistic rather than reductionist; to work in natural settings rather than artificial laboratories. When we start to see storytelling as an aspect of inquiry we discover an important new dimension: inquiry can work either to explain or to express; to analyse or to understand. (ibid: 79).

They then distinguish between explanation and expression:

Explanation is the mode of classifying, conceptualising, and building theories from experience. Here the inquirer ‘stands back’, analyses, discovers or invents concepts, and relates theses in a theoretical model. This is essentially an analytical approach: dividing holistic experience into manageable components. Orthodox science is an exercise in explanation, endeavouring to answer questions of *what* and *why*.

Expression is the mode of allowing the meaning of experience to become manifest. It requires the inquirer to partake deeply of experience, rather than stand back in order to analyse. Meaning is part and parcel of all experience, although it may be so interwoven with that experience that it is hidden: it needs to be discovered, created, or made manifest, and communicated. (ibid: 79-80)

In their view, story-telling as a model of inquiry offers the potential for a viable and valid research strategy.

In reviewing the value of the work done in the TLI group, it would indeed appear that it was in the telling of the stories that most learning took place. When I looked at the inquiry in this light, I began to make greater sense of a process which I, and others, appeared to feel was of immense value; but where we seemed to do little more than share our experiences with each other. Indeed it would suggest that, even in the third year, when we had assumed that our inquiry had come to an end, it may in fact have been continuing; however, because we were not connecting the idea of story telling with researching, then we felt that we were not doing anything constructive in terms of developing knowledge. We were, though, continuing to develop knowledge for ourselves, in so far as we were truly sharing our experiences with others, and listening

to theirs; what we were not doing is recognizing that the story telling was itself the methodology.

...in story-telling the role of the listener is as important as that of the teller – in some sense it is a process of the co-construction (or co-discovery) of meaning. In their section on ‘taking stories’, (Riches and Dawes state) “by explicitly adopting a collaborative paradigm, research knowledge can be conceived of as a ‘co-production’”. (Wilkins 2000: 145-146)

Wilkins continues:

The validity of a story-building approach lies in that it “rests on a collaborative encounter with experience.” (Reason and Heron 1988: 465) Because it is concerned with people’s perceptions, the knowledge they create through doing, not with “objective” reality, story-building has intrinsic validity. As McLeod (1994: 97) has pointed out, in qualitative research the concept of reliability cannot be applied in the same way as in quantitative studies. He suggests that “trustworthiness” may take its place. Heron (1996: 168) writes: “There can be personal, idiosyncratic truth, as well as shared, intersubjective truth; and both are always formed within the context of a particular language and culture. This makes truth a variable, unfolding, artefact of creative minds in ever-shifting social contexts, participating in, and shaping, given being” and “A proposition, in my view, is not true because it works, rather it works because it is true.” (ibid:169)

If, in the story-building process, attention is paid to group dynamics and action is taken to ensure that “consensus collusion” is reduced, then it will accurately reflect the authentic experience of the participants. This authenticity corresponds to Heron’s “truth” and contributes to the trustworthiness of the research. (Wilkins 2000: 148)

I was able now to see how, within our TLI group, we had discovered ‘story-telling’ as a means of both developing knowledge, and presenting our learning to others. The sharing of our individual stories had in itself contributed to transformative outcomes; we felt there had developed a ‘group consciousness’, which was rich and profound. There was also a sense of mutually participating in a spiritual dimension that was a source of nourishment for us individually and collectively.

Story-telling, then, seems to offer a powerful means of understanding the world, and for learning to live creative and fulfilling lives within it. How exciting this feels! If I see myself as part of a developing story, where the initiating author desires to use its imagination as fully as possible, and create characters who will interact within that imagination in ways that, to repeat Pullman’s words, will set minds ‘alive and ablaze with excitement and passion’, then suddenly life becomes full of limitless possibilities. Perhaps also, if that initiating author is not only the primary intelligence, but is, as so many of the spiritual traditions say, ‘pure love’, then it may well seek to see its creation manifest that love in all that it becomes.

If some of its characters, however, lose sight of their origins, and take on an identity of their own, that is when the illusion sets in. For they are still there in the imagination of the author; but for the moment they perceive and act as though they are autonomous

entities. At this stage, in Heron's terms, the characters still remain 'known'; but are not conscious knowers. They may then act in ways that feel destructive to other characters.

Many story tellers tell tales in which characters are fragmented in themselves, isolated from others, and destructive in their behaviour. This adversely affects the unfolding of the story of the whole, and limits the potential creativity; but does not mean the story is any less a part of the imagination of the teller.

If I am to carry this ontology in my mind, what effect does it have on my consciousness? My main response to this is to say: 'how liberating'.

If I know that I reside in the imagination of a loving compassionate, dynamic intelligence with limitless creative potential, who desires me to live out my story to the full, and will give me full reign to do so if I can handle it, then I can respond to that, with no fear of consequences. I need not fear being adversely judged or condemned for what I do. Given the knowledge I have developed during the course of this enquiry, there is one criterion that I can reliably use to guide me and that is that, in everything I think and do, I do it in the consciousness that I am interconnected to everything that is. If I move around the world in this consciousness, then the actions I take will enhance that connection, and will seek to engage those who feel separated. I need to know fully with the whole of my being that every part of the universe has also emerged from the author's imagination; and in that respect, everything and everyone that materializes is of equal value. If I perceive all I encounter in this way, then my developing hypothesis suggests that the actions I choose will be those that enhance my interconnection; and in that way, I will be helping to create a more coherent story.

This felt a powerful conclusion to reach. As I practised living with this mindset, in this state of consciousness, I could truly feel a transformative shift in terms of how I perceived myself and the world. I believe this evolution in my own consciousness over time qualitatively improved my ability to connect in a meaningful way with others, and also enhanced my increasing sense of spiritual resilience through being connected to a loving, dynamic, intelligent energy with limitless creative potential.

This was a subjective experience, which I could not provide objective evidence for. However, I felt the time had come for me to consider whether my learning and experience to date could help me reach a better understanding of some of the questions that had triggered this enquiry in the first place; in other words, could they help me better understand the roots of pain, suffering and violence, particularly in relation to children in the care system.

Chapter 14

The Challenge for a Science of Consciousness in Addressing Issues involving Suffering and Violence

During my enquiry, I had moved away from professional social work practice, and had become engaged in an exploration of theory and experience that seemed far distant from my initial role as a residential worker. However, it was my concern for young people in care that had triggered the enquiry, and they never strayed far from my attention.

Often their need to leave their family home was as a result of being victims of abuse and violence; and often they reflected their pain and damage through being violent and abusive to others. As part of my thesis, I wanted to include a chapter that enabled me to identify where my thinking and enquiry into factors affecting troubled young people had taken me; and the understanding I had gained into the reasons and possible resolutions to violent behaviour.

I had progressed a long way, both intellectually and professionally, since I started work in the children's home at the age of eighteen. In those early days, I had been emotionally affected by the distressing and often violent family situations the young people came from, to an extent that my self confidence was damaged. I had had my eyes opened to aspects of life of which previously I had been unaware; coming to terms with the reality of these led to feelings of helplessness and depression. What explanation could be given for a world in which such pain was prevalent? What could I do to overcome my ignorance and perceived inadequacy?

I spent eight out of the next fifteen years working in residential children's homes. In total, I experienced ten different homes, the shortest length of time being three months, the longest four years. Many of the young people I worked with were not only victims of deprivation and violence; but would initiate damage to other people, themselves, or to property – sometimes all three. Throughout that time, I never gained any sense of being an adequate helper to these young people. I built good relationships with some of them; and on a number of occasions felt that I played a role in enabling them move towards better living circumstances, whether that be within their own family, in a foster home, or in semi-independent accommodation. However, at no point did I feel that I was able to address the roots of their problems, and identify ways whereby the cycle of pain and violence could be brought to an end. All too often, these young people came from families where deprivation was the norm; and due to lack of appropriate help, would continue to create those contexts for their own children.

My experience reflected that described by Eli Godsi, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, and Head of Forensic Psychology in Nottingham:

The very systems that have for decades been given the responsibility of looking after children who have been removed from home have systematically failed many of the youngsters in their care. If the children were not already damaged by the experiences that led them into the care system, then many have been harmed or even brutalised by the very people and places that were supposed to be protecting them from further harm. ... If children look to the staff who look after them for models of relationships, they will all too often be disappointed. Most care workers are poorly trained or have no training at all, and the staff turnover in such units is typically very high, so that once again the relationship with many of these adults is also transient. On top of this, such units are routinely understaffed, poorly managed, and the staff badly paid. Reflecting the wider cultural attitudes towards these children, care staff themselves will generally be split into those who are essentially punitive in outlook and those who see their role as one of possible rehabilitation. Many staff see care work as simply a job like any other, and are frequently and steadfastly punitive in their outlook; they see their task as basically controlling the 'bad' children in their care. Others are much kinder in outlook and see their role in terms of genuinely trying to care for and to help the children in their overall development. In this way, almost all the care and residential units I have come across are characterised by a tension between control on the one hand and rehabilitation on the other. More often than not, they simply contain the children until it is time for them to leave. (Godsi 1999: 145)

Three years spent in field social work reinforced my belief that social work as a profession was inadequately resourced to deal with the challenges with which it was presented. Much of my time was spent in communities where a wide range of social problems were in abundance, including extreme poverty, high levels of crime, and drug and alcohol abuse. During the 1970's, when I was in this role, there was dawning a realisation of the extensive nature of physical abuse of children; up to that point, parents or carers were able to make a range of excuses for injuries to children, which were accepted. It was to be another decade before there grew to be the same awareness regarding the extent of sexual abuse. In the meantime, what I experienced as a social worker were children – and parents – who were damaged and damaging; often, I did not have the knowledge as to the causes of that damage. My feelings of helplessness continued.

One of the frustrations for me was that during my social work training, I did learn much that I felt helped me gain some understanding as to why individuals might exhibit behavioural and psychological problems; but discovered that that knowledge was not socially valued or validated. Within social psychology, there was a wide range of theories which indicated the significance of the early socialisation process. If a child did not receive adequate nurturing or care during their early years, then there would be a high risk of them becoming dysfunctional in wider society. Sociology offered a whole new perspective. An individual's behaviour could be understood to be a consequence, not just of their experience within the immediate family environment; but due to the wider social conditions in which they were brought up. Consequently, the power relations in society, the social structures that were established, the ways in which these structures favoured some groups of people, and disadvantaged others, all had an influence. An individual's life chances were greatly influenced by the social context in which they were raised.

In this way, I realised that each person had a responsibility to help create a society in which every other person had a chance to live a productive and fulfilling life. However, even at that stage, I realised that the society in which I lived was a long way from collaboratively accepting such responsibility. Most people did not want to 'own' any social problems; as long as it was not on their doorstep, then they could ignore it. When, through the media or through personal experience, they became aware of a situation they felt to be unacceptable, like the death of Maria Colwell at the hands of her mother and stepfather (6 January 1973) then they wanted social workers to deal with it. The conscience of society was reposed in social work. No interest or attention was paid to any positive work done which enabled children, families and communities to function more effectively. However, if things went wrong, social workers were often made the scapegoat.

The idea of the scapegoat has its origins in the Bible. Aaron takes two goats and brings them to the front of the Temple. One, chosen as a result of casting lots, is consecrated to God and sacrificed. The second is used as a vessel to receive the sins of Israel, and is driven into the desert.

The goat, on which the lot fell for the scapegoat, shall be presented before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness (Leviticus, Chapter XVI, verse 10).

This action enabled the community to be purified by symbolically projecting its sins onto a substitute, which was then sent to a far distant place.

It was, perhaps, a primitive way of dealing with communal guilt, but this ritual gave us the word 'Scapegoat' to describe somebody who is punished for the sins of others. We needed this term, because when something goes wrong human beings have a deep-rooted compulsion to find somebody – preferably somebody else – to blame.The trouble with this type of projection is that it makes it all too easy to ignore our own culpability. ...Some scholars have explained the scapegoat in terms of depth psychology. It represents part of the 'shadow side' of the personality, which the conscious self finds difficult to accept and feels compelled to destroy.The scapegoat ritual is rooted in a profoundly dualistic worldview. It makes it clear that while the scapegoat is doomed, all those who stand within the community are safe and pure. In moments of crisis and anxiety, people often feel compelled to draw lines in the sand. The danger is that people come to think that those on the 'other side' are irredeemably evil and inhuman. ...the scapegoat ritual tends to flourish in times of high anxiety. It expresses a dangerous confusion of incompatible but explosive emotions: fear, hatred, love, a yearning for purity, and contempt for the other. In the west we take pride in our secular rationalism, and yet we seem caught up in patterns of thought and feeling that are as primitive as those (whom we see as alien to us). ..We must abandon the scapegoat ethos, which does not encourage self-criticism and allows us to project many of our own failings on to others. (Armstrong 2004)

I was conscious that the social work profession was made to carry the blame for society's inability to find solutions to severe social problems. My role as a social worker did not gain respect from the majority of people. I was seen to belong to a 'do-gooding, wishy-washy group of people' who made lame excuses for those who were lazy, criminal, or in some other way fundamentally inadequate. I understood the

critique; however, whilst not absolving people of responsibility for their actions, and accepting that society had to be protected from those who caused damage, I also believed passionately that the more privilege and education a person had, the more they should be prepared to explore the roots of the problems that existed, and not always project the blame onto others. I would have wished everyone share with McWaters the “recognition that I am part of the larger wholeness of life, a great chain of being, and the well-being of the wholeness is my responsibility too.” (1982, quoted in Gang 1992: 9)

It was clear this was not going to happen; and yet if there was to be any hope for young people in pain, I felt that the challenge had to be faced. If I remained in social work, I knew I would be defeated by the feelings of frustration and helplessness. What I had to offer any individual would be extremely limited, given that it was unlikely I could achieve more than placing a temporary plaster on a wound. The level of stress amongst social workers was high; I was aware that for me it would become overwhelming. I needed to find a situation where I would have time and energy to devote to seeking a greater understanding, not only of sources of pain and violence; but also how societies could be transformed so that each person would receive positive attention, and could feel valued and wanted. I realised that this was a somewhat idealistic vision. However, it arose from the deeper parts of me that believed anything was ultimately possible; and I wanted to do what I could to achieve that end.

This led me to move in the direction that I have earlier outlined: professionally into education, then self-employment as a consultant and trainer, then with a colleague, starting an organisation. Intellectually, I continued to enquire into reasons and resolutions for emotional pain. As my enquiry progressed, and I became increasingly and acutely aware of high levels of pain and violence throughout the world, my focus of interest expanded to include suffering that happened in any context. This took me on the journey that has formed the major part of this thesis – and includes an analysis of factors which influence our world view, the learning I have gained from a range of sources, and an increasing interest in developing a ‘science of consciousness’. I believed that it was in the latter that we would perhaps find a way to pro-actively and with awareness participate in an ‘evolution of consciousness’, and learn how to realise the vision of a peaceful and harmonious world.

My experiential and intellectual exploration had taken me to a place where I felt more at peace with myself and the world. We began the TLI group by stating that each one of us could only contribute to transforming the world through transforming self. I certainly felt in a very different place to where I started. However, this inquiry had moved into areas that seemed a long way removed from its starting point; that is, a desire to find a way to understand how there could be meaning and purpose in a world where there was so much suffering and violence, and how to effectively respond to such suffering. The desire had always stayed present in my mind though, reminding me that the value of research for me was eventually to develop knowledge that would support myself and others in the living of ‘better lives’.

Consequently, it seemed important that I considered as part of this thesis what application my exploration into science, spirituality, depth psychology and consciousness studies had for an understanding of the roots of suffering and violence, and the promotion of peace and well-being.

Understanding attitudes to troubled young people within a Newtonian world view

In my earlier analysis of Newtonian science, I proposed that its principles influenced the dominant world view in western society. Three of the most important principles of “the clockwork universe” are atomism, determinism, and separation. (Clarke 1999). Atomism plays the most central role – the idea that the universe consists of a vast number of fundamental particles moving in an infinite void. These particles exist separately from each other – there is no necessary relationship or connection between any of the individual particles. Further, their movement is governed by laws, which, once discovered, will enable us to predict what will happen. The existence of these laws means that the movement of the atoms are pre-determined.

I could see attitudes reflecting these principles being held, not just by many people in mainstream society, but also amongst those working with troubled young people. One of the most pervasive beliefs was that these children somehow belonged to a different order of people to themselves.

Closely allied to the myth that violent or distressed people are born and not made is the commonly held belief that troubled, difficult or distressed children emerge from the womb already predisposed to such characteristics. The notion that children are born wild or savage, or in some way inherently evil, still implicitly pervade many contemporary beliefs about children and childhood, and it resurfaces whenever there is a high-profile case in the media involving child perpetrators. This ideology has come in various guises and has profound implications for how childhood has been viewed this century, and for the ways in which we make sense of children as they develop. (Godsi 1999: 142)

When, as a self-employed consultant, I worked with staff groups in residential homes, I would be horrified at the number of people who believed the young people in their care were ‘inherently evil’ – the implication being that they (the staff) were inherently good. Their main explanation for a child’s criminal or destructive behaviour was that they had been ‘born into families with defective genes’. This enabled them to divide the world into ‘us and them’ – a world where individuals were not connected – and hence there was no reason why they should take any responsibility for the conditions that created these children. Indeed, the principle of determinism meant that it was not possible to enable any fundamental change – genetic inheritance resulted in a child’s history being determined by the nature of its origins.

In order that staff could begin to see that there may be other explanations for the children’s behaviour, I would run a simple exercise. I would first ask people to think of any situation that had made them angry. They would name a range of issues, including ones that most people could relate to, such as someone pushing in front of them in a supermarket queue, being cut up while driving, or being kept waiting in a travel agency whilst the person working prioritised the answering of phone calls. None of these was a major event, but they could engender strong feelings in some people. More significant situations included a friend who betrayed a trust, a partner who was unfaithful, or an employer who exploited them in inappropriate ways. I then asked them how they might respond in such situations. Answers contained various responses indicating frustration, including a range of aggressive reactions, such as swearing, shouting, throwing something, pushing or hitting somebody, and losing their temper. I asked them to

identify what had caused them to act in this aggressive way. Although there were many explanations given, including not knowing what else to do, feeling helpless, and needing to get rid of their frustration, the common theme was a sense of powerlessness. They found themselves in a situation in which they perceived themselves as out of control – and often this was expressed through some form of aggressive response. Many saw this as being quite normal – although not necessarily desirable, they felt that it was completely understandable that they should behave in this way. Indeed, they would often see it as quite funny; anecdotes would be told of, for example, women who in a rage because their husband had cheated on them, had destroyed his clothes, or damaged his car.

I would then ask them to reflect on the situations of the young people in their care. If they, as mature adults, could engage in or understand aggressive behaviour as a response to feeling powerless in just one aspect of their lives; what could they expect of young people, who had been powerless and out of control of their lives from the day they had been born? Why should they condone and make excuses for their own actions, but condemn those of the young people in their care? The young people's behaviour may be more extreme; but the powerlessness they experienced in their lives was also more extreme.

For decades, the popular belief about children who were put 'in care' was that they were removed from home because these particular children were in some way or another bad. Thus these children used to be referred to as 'juvenile delinquents', and in many ways they are still viewed simplistically as out-of-control trouble makers. The reality, however, is that in most cases these children have been removed from home through circumstances and experiences that were not their fault, and over which they had little or no control. ...children who are profoundly distressed and disturbed by abuse, instability and neglect are in most cases taken away from 'home' for their own protection: because their home environment had been deemed by the local authorities to be unsafe or unsustainable in the interest of the child's (or other people's) welfare. (ibid: 143)

I was trying to enable staff to see that these were not evil children; they were children responding in understandable, though not desirable ways, to the living contexts they found themselves in. More importantly, I was trying to enable staff members to experience some kind of connection with the young people. I wanted them to adopt a set of values very different to those which have been imbued in us in a society based on the principles of Newtonian science; to perceive themselves as being part of a 'participatory reality', where the idea of participation implies that we are all intricately connected to each other and to the whole. I wanted them to be aware that, in experiencing the relationship between the part and the whole, there is a need to engage with the whole as fully as possible. This requires empathy, a deep identification with the other. Skolimowski (1994) claims that none of this can be achieved without a sense of compassion for all we encounter. In accepting the idea of a participatory reality, we would need to experience a shift in consciousness; a transition from a consciousness that sees separate beings moving around in an objective world, to a compassionate consciousness in which there is true empathy between all people.

My personal experience would suggest that the effects of such a transition would be highly significant. It would mean that in all social interactions, we would seek to relate

to the internal world of another, rather than to their external behaviour. We would aim to understand why people behave as they do, and respond appropriately. Learning to develop relationships with the universe and everything within it that are based on internal connection and identification, rather than external observation and judgmental reaction, would surely lead to a reality of a radically different order. A residential child care service based on this philosophy, and the experiences of all staff and young people living within it, would be completely transformed.

Of course, this is currently a dream; and many would say, stands no chance of ever being realised in practice. I think this is an understandable stance to take.

The reality of these children's and adolescents' lives is all too often a picture of abuse, neglect and chaos. It is hard to see how a child can develop a sense of morality or a sense of personal responsibility, or to co-operate with and respect others, when they have grown up in a totally immoral world, one where no one has taken any responsibility for them and where they have been shown little or no respect or care. It is just as hard to understand how they are to develop a sense of control over their own actions when their lives have been characterised by an almost total lack of control over what happens to them, over their relationships, over where they reside or for how long. Equally, it is hard to see how they are supposed to develop a sense of empathy with others and to take account of other people's feelings when no one has afforded them the same respect. To expect these human values to be innate is like expecting a child in an English-speaking country to grow up fluent in Chinese. (ibid: 149)

However, given the learning I have experienced in the living of my story, I cannot accept that the situation is hopeless. Given I believe that the story of humankind may also be the story of an evolution of consciousness, I can see the possibilities for social transformation as more people move through the evolutionary stages. How best to support that process is a major challenge; but one I am committed to facing.

Jeffrey Dahmer: A Case Study in Violence

I decided to look at the story of Jeffrey Dahmer, who as a mass murderer personified extreme violence. I wanted to see whether there was any particular aspect of his history that might place further light on why individuals should wish to live such destructive lives. Dahmer from between the years 1988 to 1991 was known to kill and dismember 17 young men, before finally being caught. Brian Masters(1993) has written a biography of Dahmer, in which he seeks to find explanations for Dahmer's behaviour.

Throughout Masters' account and analysis, I found it significant how often feelings indicating disconnection and separateness were mentioned. On talking about the psychological tests that Dahmer was subjected to once he was finally caught, Masters writes:

The tests indicate "a man seemingly self-doomed to isolation and disconnectedness". He is a man who feels powerless to cope with the world of the living, where people do and say things without reference to him. Secondly, he is trapped by the trivial and utterly devoid of grand design or purposeful energies. His self-image is extremely weak; he feels that he counts for nothing and is worthless. He needs to be something more than he is, something greater;

he needs to grow and expand, but feels smothered. “The man who is able to assert himself in a socially acceptable fashion is seldom vicious; it is the weak who are most likely to stab one in the back” (Storr 1972: 21)

The truth of this remark of Storr’s needs to be emphasised. It is a paradox, and one of which we must take firm notice if we are to spot murderers in advance, that the worst and most hideous crimes are committed not by monsters of power and magnetism, but by individuals who feel impotent and inadequate. The man whose will reigns over his life and environment does not need to nourish it on destruction; it is satisfied already. But if one’s will to achieve is blocked, either by oneself or by outside influences, the resulting dam of frustration is extremely dangerous. Jeffrey Dahmer had no self-image to validate his life or justify his existence. He was a waste. He felt reduced to an inconsequential object, a piece of flotsam bobbing on the surface of life. Just as he objectified his sexual partners, because he knew no other way, so he was in turn objectified and rendered useless by the cruel sweep of circumstance. Or so he felt. (1993:101)

These two paragraphs support the notion I discussed in the previous section, that it is ultimately feelings of powerlessness that form the basis of violence. Dahmer had no-one relating to him in a way that made him feel worthwhile and of value as a human being; all his experiences seemed to reinforce his feelings that he was of no significance. His father was obsessed with his work; his mother suffered mental health problems. On a daily basis, she took large quantities of tranquilizers, laxatives, and sleeping pills. Eventually, she was hospitalised in a ward for people with mental illness. In the following section, I highlight the words which indicate feelings of lack of connection that appear to epitomise the violent person.

Jeff’s response was classic. He blamed himself for his mother’s illness. He had known for as long as he could remember that she had been depressed following his birth, and that he had therefore caused the illness. He must also have caused every relapse. He could not articulate his pain, for fear of tipping his mother over the edge again. ... (He felt) utter **isolation**.

This early sense of **alienation** is a common feature of many men who become compulsive murderers. Joseph Kallinger whose case was extensively studied by Flora Rheta Schreiber in *The Shoemaker*, said, “**I had a lack of feeling that I was part of anybody – or that anybody was a part of me**”. The notorious torturer Leonard Lake, arrested in San Francisco in 1985, similarly **felt himself to be outside of life**, watching. (He committed suicide while in custody). So did the boastful ‘serial killer’ Henry Lee Lucas, arrested in Texas in 1983, whose mother was psychiatrically impaired. **They all felt in some way adrift, disconnected from the universe** inhabited by everyone else, all those people who *belong* together and who are bonded. **They are apart and alone**. They live in an emotional **no-man’s land**.

The strange character of Meursault in Albert Camus’ novel *L’Etranger* is a literary echo.It is the **alienation** of the central character which illuminates. Meursault kills a man on the beach in Algeria for no particular reason: he is bored and the man was there.It is not that Meursault is callous and cruel, simply that he does not fit. He cannot respond as other people do, either morally or emotionally, because his moral and emotional development has been blocked. He doesn’t care because he *can’t* care – **he is separate from the world** of affection and regard.

To be part of that world, the child must feel that his existence is beneficent, productive of good. If it is not, then he should withdraw. ...If the child grows

into a man who cannot relate in any obvious way, he will find an aberrant way to relate, through cruelty, or sadism, or control, or ultimately through destruction. **Complete isolation becomes in the end unbearable.**

An anonymous patient articulates the problem in this way: I've been sort of dead in a way. **I cut myself off from other people and became shut up in myself. And I can see that you become dead in a way when you do this.** You have to live in the world *with* other people. And this is Dahmer's own reflection: 'I don't even know if I have the capacity for normal emotions or not because I haven't cried for a long time. You just stifle them for so long that maybe you lose them partially at least. I don't know'. (Masters 1993: 40-42, emphasis added)

It would seem, then, that in living within a world view which promotes an image of a depersonalised universe ultimately consisting of separate 'bits' – individual atoms whose behaviour is predetermined as a consequence of pre-existing conditions – we are creating a context within which psychological feelings of alienation and separation can thrive. Dahmer's behaviour is an extreme; but our society is rife with people who feel isolated, alienated and lonely; and who do not believe they have a valuable role to play in the world. Our culture's lack of interest in understanding the nature of subjectively experienced consciousness, based on an implicit assumption derived from materialist science that it is 'not of significance', and hence not worthy of being in receipt of research funding, means that such feelings of powerlessness and isolation is likely to continue; and consequently the violence will continue. Until there is a political and societal recognition that consciousness is a causal factor in behaviour, and there is commitment to understanding the nature of the relationship between the two, then proposed solutions to prevent violence are unlikely to be effective.

Stanislav Grof: Science of Consciousness and the Roots of Violence

Despite the general lack of research undertaken within a science of consciousness concerning the causes of violence, and means of achieving both internal and external peace, there have been some initiatives undertaken in this area. I have been particularly interested in the work of Stanislaw Grof; in the use of transcendental meditation promoted by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi within a Vedic 'science of consciousness'; and in a perspective that sees Buddhism as a science. Their approaches are different – but each is worthwhile exploring.

Grof is a psychiatrist, of Polish origin, who has over forty years experience of research into non-ordinary states of consciousness. He has published many books, detailing the methods and outcomes of his research. He focuses on experiences that represent a:

useful source of data about the human psyche and the nature of reality, particularly those that reveal various aspects of the spiritual dimension of existence. I would also like to examine the healing, transformative and evolutionary potential of these experiences. For this purpose, the term nonordinary states of consciousness is too general, since it includes a wide range of conditions that are not interesting or relevant from this point of view. (Grof 1998: 5)

Grof identifies that various pathological processes, such as infection or degenerative processes in the brain, can result in altered states of consciousness. These can lead to people being delirious, disorientated, or subject to a range of confusions that mean their intellectual facilities are fundamentally disturbed. In the nonordinary states of consciousness that Grof seeks to facilitate, the aim is to ‘move in the direction of wholeness’. Thus, he adopted the word ‘holotropic’, from the Greek *holos*, meaning whole, and *trepein*, meaning moving in the direction of something. His premise is that in our everyday consciousness we are “not really whole; we are fragmented and identify with only a small fraction of who we really are”. (ibid: 5)

A holotropic state is induced by a range of techniques: these can include the use of psychedelic drugs, drumming, chanting, and rhythmic dancing. Grof has developed a form of breathing, combined with evocative music, and a specific form of focused body work that induces the change in consciousness required. This is characterised by a shift in perception in all sensory faculties, and includes intense and often unusual emotions. There can also be a profound change in thought processes. The experience of the individual involved is that they are opened up to other dimensions of existence that can feel overwhelming. However, they stay fully oriented, and do not completely lose touch with everyday reality. Hence, they are at the same time experiencing two very different orders of reality. During this experience, a person can be flooded with images drawn from their personal history, and, Grof claims, from the collective unconscious. There can be extreme emotions, that extend far beyond those normally experienced – including feelings of ecstasy, heavenly bliss, and “peace that passeth all understanding”, to occurrences of great terror, overwhelming fear, and utter despair. It is said that the intensity of these experiences can seem very like the descriptions of the tortures of hell in some of the great religions of the world.

At the same time as experiencing these sensations, the person’s intellect continues to function, but in a very different way to normal. It can be flooded with new information on a range of subjects. These can include major insights into personal history, emotional difficulties, and interpersonal problems. It can also include astonishing revelations about nature and the cosmos that go way beyond previous educational input. Significant philosophical and spiritual insights also form part of the learning.

Grof draws a parallel between what he learns from working with people in non-ordinary states of consciousness, and what has been described in the context of spiritual and mystical traditions, such as Vedanta, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, and Christian mysticism.

The findings of my research and contemporary consciousness research in general essentially confirm and support the position of these ancient teachings. They are thus in radical conflict with the most fundamental assumptions of materialistic science concerning consciousness, human nature, and the nature of reality. They clearly indicate that consciousness is not a product of the brain, but a primary principle of existence, and that it plays a critical role in the creation of the phenomenal world.

This research also radically changes our conception of the human psyche. It shows that, in its farthest reaches, the psyche of each of us is essentially commensurate with all of existence and ultimately identical with the cosmic creative principle itself. This conclusion, while seriously challenging the

worldview of modern technological societies, is in far-reaching agreement with the image of reality found in the great spiritual and mystical traditions of the world, which Aldous Huxley referred to as the “perennial philosophy.” (Grof 1998: 3)

Grof maintains that modern consciousness research supports the view that there is a “grand purposeful design underlying all of creation and has shown that all of existence is permeated by superior intelligence”. (ibid) In the light of this, spirituality is seen to be a significant and legitimate aspect of human activity, since it plays such a central role in the human psyche. Grof argues that the spiritual and mystical traditions of the past have been inappropriately dismissed as being unscientific or irrational. “This is an uninformed judgement that is unwarranted and unjustified. Many of the great spiritual systems are products of centuries of in-depth exploration of the human psyche and consciousness that in many ways resembles scientific research”. (ibid: 4)

Grof lays claim to his work being seen as scientific, due to the fact that his methods can be tried out by individuals who choose to do so, and hence makes validation possible. He conducted workshops all over the world, and gained information from many hundreds of people who had not only completed the workshops, but had undergone training which then enabled them to facilitate holotropic breathwork sessions themselves. Thus he has been able to collect a huge repertoire of evidence, which provide the basis for his radical contentions.

Within his work, Grof identifies violence as being one of the two most powerful psychological forces in human history (the second being greed). He maintains that more people have been killed in the last hundred years than have existed from the beginning of humanity up to the end of the 19th century. We are the first species in history to have the ability to destroy both itself, and all life on the planet. His claim is that the current crisis is psychospiritual in nature, and “cannot be resolved without a radical inner transformation of humanity on a large scale.” He believes that, although this may seem a hopeless task, there are a number of developments which offer new strategies:

- * Development of a new image of the Universe, and of a more comprehensive understanding of human nature and of the psyche.
- * Experiential approaches facilitating positive personal transformation and consciousness evolution.
- * Transpersonal psychology, consciousness research, and the global crisis.

I could relate to all of these. In the unfolding of my own story, each of them had come to play an increasingly significant role.

However, Grof also believes that there is a new understanding of the roots of malignant aggression and human violence. This is the area I was interested in exploring more. At the beginning of his paper, he makes a powerful statement:

Malignant aggression does not reflect true human nature; it is connected with a domain of unconscious, perinatal dynamics that separates us from our deeper identity. Those who initiate war activities and violence in general are typically substituting external targets for elements in their own psyches, which should properly be faced in personal self-exploration. The circumstances of birth play

an important role in creating a disposition to violence and self-destructive tendencies or to loving behaviour and healthy interpersonal relationships; thus changing birth practices to kinder and gentler ones would have a huge impact on the degree of violence acted out in the world.

He believes that hope lies in deep experiential approaches that facilitate personal transformation, achieved through psychospiritual death/rebirth, and connection with the memories of positive post natal or prenatal memories. In his experience, such approaches have consistently resulted in the emergence of a profound spiritual sense of the infinite, accompanied by a development of deep humanitarian and ecological concerns in individuals.

The current global situation has exteriorised many of the essential themes of the perinatal dynamics. If we continue to act out the problematic destructive and self-destructive tendencies originating in the depths of the unconscious, we will undoubtedly destroy ourselves and the life on this planet. However, if we succeed in internalising this process on a large enough scale, it might result in an evolutionary progress that can take us as far beyond our present conditions as we now are from primates. Thus, it is essential to spread the information about these possibilities for transformation and consciousness evolution and get enough people personally interested in pursuing them. We seem to be involved in a dramatic race for time that has no precedent in the entire human history.”
(Grof: <http://www.primalspirit.com>)

For the main part, I could not dispute this – it reflected too strongly my own sense of what was going on in the world. Having experienced deep inner work as being the means of bringing a sense of peace and equanimity to my life, I felt that it was reasonable to infer that only deep inner work on a large scale will enable the transformative shift in consciousness required to avert the global crisis. The aspect of Grof’s writing that was experientially (though not conceptually) unfamiliar to me, was the connection with perinatal experiences.

Historically, there have been a range of explanations for aggressive and violent behaviour. During the 19th and 20th centuries, it was seen as being part of the evolutionary process. Humans emerged from animals, and with this, inherited the aggressive instincts that are integral to the animal world. However, animals do not normally initiate unjustified violence – they do so when they are hungry, defending their territory, or in some other way fighting for survival of themselves or their own. Human aggression occurs on a much wider scale. Psychodynamic theories claimed to explain these other forms as being a reaction to frustration, abuse and a lack of love during infancy and childhood. However, is this sufficient to explain murders of the type committed by Jeffrey Dahmer? Or indeed the attempts at genocide of whole races, such as the Nazis against the Jews?

Grof claims that recent research based on the inducement of nonordinary states of consciousness, has provided another, more satisfactory explanation. He believes that the sources of this aspect of human behaviour has much deeper and daunting roots than traditional psychology has so far envisaged. The experience of many of those participating in his workshops has provided extensive evidence that significant roots of violence, although connected with abuse and frustration in early childhood, are also influenced by the trauma of biological birth. Apparently being the victim of pain and

suffocation experienced for many hours prior to delivery, generates huge feelings of anxiety and murderous aggression which remain stored in the organism. Grof finds that many people, in a non-ordinary state of consciousness, revert to the time of birth, and relive the birth experience. This does not just include the emotions and sensations at the time; but also there can be portrayed powerful scenes depicting wars, concentration camps, genocide, and other shockingly violent scenarios.

Grof expands in detail the different stages of birth, and their relationships to different stages of history. He also develops a comprehensive theory around the connections between socio-political events and the psychological dynamics of those involved. He believes that the spiritual and psychological dimensions of such events offer additional and important insights to the historical, economic, political, religious and other forces which influence what happens.

He claims that his work is corroborated by the research undertaken by Lloyd deMause, a psychoanalyst and historian. DeMause is one of the founders of 'psychohistory', a discipline that applies the findings of depth psychology to history and political science. Psycho-historians study issues such as the relationship between the childhood history of political leaders and their systems of values and processes of decision making. DeMause has identified a large number of figures of speech, metaphors, and images related to biological birth in the writings and comments made by military leaders and politicians throughout the ages. He has also collected many historical examples which support the thesis that the memory of the birth trauma plays an important role as a source of motivation for violent social activity.

Grof summarises his conclusions as follows:

According to the new insights – provided jointly by observations from non-ordinary states of consciousness and the findings of psychohistory – we all carry in our deep unconscious powerful energies and emotions associated with the trauma of birth that we have not adequately mastered and assimilated. For some of us, this aspect of depth self-exploration with the use of psychedelics or some powerful experiential techniques of psychotherapy, such as holotropic breathwork, primal therapy, or rebirthing. Others of us can have varying degrees of awareness of the emotions and physical sensations stored on the perinatal level of the unconscious.

The activation of this material can lead to serious individual psychopathology, including unmotivated violence. It seems that, for unknown reasons, awareness of the perinatal elements can increase simultaneously in a large number of people. This creates an atmosphere of tension, anxiety, and anticipation. The leader is an individual who is under a stronger influence of the perinatal energies than an average person. He also has the ability to disown his unacceptable feelings (the Shadow in Jung's terminology) and to project them onto the external situation. The collective discomfort is blamed on the enemy, and a military intervention is offered as a solution". (Grof: <http://www.primalspirit.com>)

Grof then goes on to suggest that war provides an opportunity for individuals to abandon the psychological defences that ordinarily keep the dangerous perinatal tendencies in check. Being violent is now seen as praiseworthy, and medals are given out as a consequence. Once war erupts, destructive impulses can be acted out.

Various no-exit situations, sadomasochistic orgies, sexual violence, bestial and demonic behaviour, and the unleashing of enormous explosive energies, are all enacted in wars and revolutions with extraordinary vividness and power. (ibid)

I was not sure how to respond to Grof's theory. I could see there was substantial evidence to support it; and I have known people who have experienced and found his workshops to be useful. One of these is a medical doctor, whose integrity I trust, and who considered the process to be of sufficient value to train to be a facilitator himself.

However, I felt that he was perhaps placing too much emphasis on this one explanation of violence; and not providing sufficient explanation about whether he would see differences in the perinatal experience as accounting for people who were not violent. For example, although there are clearly people who enjoy wars, and the adrenalin created by the conflict and impetus to injure and kill, there are others, such as pacifists, who refuse to engage in violence of any sort; and yet others who, though they join in, suffer long term distress, including post traumatic stress disorder, due to the anguish they experience as a result of involvement in the killing and violence.

These comments are not intended to negate the important role that Grof's work might well play in helping us understand the roots of violence in our society. Indeed, the thoroughness of his research in this field only serves to highlight the paucity of research into violence within consciousness studies. The most obvious example is the impact of childhood experiences; for example, the relationship between abusive and painful experiences, positive and loving experiences, and presenting behaviour.

However, if a science of consciousness is not to be restricted to pre-established assumptions, and is to be open to an examination of all possibilities, then the area of exploration would need to be expanded to include other possible dimensions of consciousness: for example, the significance of, not just perinatal experiences, but also other pre-birth situations, such as pre-natal life in the womb; the influence of the collective unconscious; the possible influence of 'subtle presences' (Heron 1998); and the reality (or otherwise) of past life experiences.

Having said that, given I was searching for research work within a science of consciousness that addressed the issue of violence, and has an explicit aim of achieving positive change in the world, then Grof meets that criteria. His work with nonordinary states of consciousness suggests that although distressing memories and visions can appear, there is also the discovery that there are effective means which can counteract and transform these dark forces. In addition, his findings suggest that violence does not reflect the core of human nature.

When we reach the transpersonal realms that lie beyond this screen of malignancy, we realise that our true nature is divine rather than bestial. This finding is fully congruent with the understanding described in the ancient Indian Unpanishads by the phrase "Tat tvam asi" (Thou art That) – meaning that, in the last analysis, each of us is identical with the creative principle of the Universe. (Grof: <http://www.primalspirit.com>)

And finally he states:

As the content of the perinatal level of the unconscious is brought into consciousness, the level of aggression typically decreases; and people become more peaceful, more comfortable with themselves, and more tolerant of others. The experience of psychospiritual rebirth and connection with the memories of positive postnatal or prenatal memories reduces irrational drives and ambitions and enhances the ability to enjoy the present circumstances of life (everyday activities, Nature, music, love-making). Experiences of cosmic unity and one's own divinity further reduce irrational drives, bring the sense of wonder and the ability to live, and open deep sources of creativity. The most consistent consequence of deep experiential self-exploration is the emergence of universal spirituality of a mystical nature that is based on personal experience. (ibid)

I could relate to this paragraph, in terms of the changes over time that I had experienced; and I had listened to members of the TLI group say similar things. However, for us, it was not accessing perinatal experiences that had initiated these changes. Rather, it was the consequence of other forms of internal work, which varied from person to person. For me, I felt that journaling, sitting in stillness, and deep contemplation especially in places of natural beauty, were the catalysts for my journey towards a place of peace. For others, yoga, disciplined meditation practices, engagement in creative artistic activities, and a range of other processes, played a role.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

A very different approach to the roots of violence within a science of consciousness has been taken by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation. Maharishi received a university degree in physics, before studying with a master of the Vedic tradition, Brahmanda Saraswati. Maharishi claims to combine expertise from both modern science and ancient wisdom. His aim has been to bring about a synthesis of objective, materialist science with the subjective Vedic science of consciousness.

The Vedic science of consciousness reflects the idea of a participatory reality, developed earlier (see Chapter 10) that is, the mind is seen to experience the deepest level of its own intelligence, not the intelligence of a separate divine Being. This is claimed to be the deepest level of intelligence displayed everywhere in nature – where the individual is attuned with the unified field. It claims it is in accord with the understanding gained from quantum physics:

In recent decades, quantum physics has revealed that, in fact, such a nonmaterial, transcendent and unified field does exist at the basis of the natural world. In the latest superstring theories, all the superficially distinct force and particle fields of nature find their common source in a single superstring field – one unified field of all the laws of nature. (<http://permanentpeace.org> accessed January 2008)

According to Vedic thinking, this unified field of nature's intelligence can be directly experienced by the human mind. Scientists, by monitoring metabolic rate and brain wave patterns, can know when a person is awake, asleep, and dreaming. They have also

identified a fourth state of consciousness; that which is achieved when a person is in a deep meditative state.

Maharishi developed the method of 'Transcendental Meditation' as a means of achieving this state of consciousness. During meditation, the mind is allowed to settle down completely and to transcend thoughts, thus attaining a state of silence and inner peace. The emphasis is on the word 'allowing', rather than 'forcing' – so taking away the idea of effort. In enabling this, the individual is said to experience Transcendental Consciousness.

It is further claimed that the experience of Transcendental Consciousness by groups of people can be demonstrated to create measurable levels of peace, due to its ability to create coherence and harmony throughout society.

The Vedic Science of Consciousness states that war does not begin in the individual minds of politicians, but rather in the collective consciousness of entire societies. By collective consciousness is meant the atmosphere that builds up amongst groups of people – which then has a re-inforcing effect on those same individuals.

All occurrences of violence, negativity, conflicts, crises, or problems in any society are just the expression of growth of stress in collective consciousness. When the level of stress becomes sufficiently great, it bursts out into external violence and war, or internal crime, accidents, and disorder. (ibid)

The theory behind peace-creating groups is that they act to prevent the destructive forces in society by dissolving stresses in the collective consciousness before it can break out as social violence.

In a deeply troubled world, the peace-creating effects of Transcendental Consciousness seem even more significant. When a large group of experts experience Transcendental Consciousness all together – enjoying the profound peace of the unified field – this powerful influence of peace radiates into the entire society. Fifty demonstration projects and twenty-three published studies have identified this radiating influence of peace, as measured by reduced crime, accidents, warfare and terrorism. (ibid)

These studies have been published in journals such as the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, the *Journal of Mind and Behaviour* and the *Social Indicators Research*, which would have required rigorous reviewing procedures (McTaggart 2001: 211). Consequently, they have a high credibility. However, the conventional scientific community does not see them as being of significance.

Buddhism as a Science

I had long been interested in Buddhism, and felt that it connected more to my value base than the other religious belief systems I had encountered. A major reason for this was that it was pragmatic, and offered specific guidance about action. Instead of beginning with theoretical ideas about the origin and nature of the universe, the Buddha invariably began with human beings, and the challenges facing them. He desired his teachings to be seen as beneficial tools – to be used when helpful as a means of resolving problems,

but to be discarded when of no further use. He also directed himself to individuals, believing that each person should find their own way towards enlightenment:

Therefore, O Ananda, be lamps unto yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast as a refuge to the Truth. Work out your own salvation with diligence. (Smith 1991: 99)

As identified earlier in this thesis, it also offered me a valuable perspective on the causes and possible solutions to suffering. At its core are the Four Noble Truths: the truths of suffering, the sources of suffering, the ending of suffering, and the path that can be followed to lead to that ending. I had understood it to be rigorous in the sense that:

It made the quality of lived experience its final test, and directed its attention to discovering cause-and-effect relationships that affected that experience. "That being present, this becomes; that not being present, this does not become." There is no effect without cause. (ibid: 98)

However, possibly because of the influence of scientific materialism, which had unconsciously persuaded me of the dominance of the physical sciences as the means of gaining knowledge, I had not seen Buddhism as offering a comparable 'science'. A workshop on 'The Heart of Buddhism', in which I participated during the latter stages of writing Part I of this thesis, enabled my understanding to move onto another level. It also helped me to explore further the relationship between alleviating suffering, promoting peace, and developing a scientific approach to consciousness.

The workshop was led by Alan Wallace, an American. Wallace, in his early 20's felt that, despite a good education and excellent career prospects, he was not able to find the meaning he sought in life in his own country. He travelled to Tibet, and spent 14 years training as a Buddhist monk. He returned to America, where over the next few years, he gained his degree in Physics and the Philosophy of Science, and his M.A and Ph.D. in Religious Studies. He regularly goes on extended retreats, is an interpreter for the Dalai Lama, and teaches Buddhist theory and practice in many parts of the world.

Wallace believes that in Tibet, and in parts of India, the search for truth has followed a different path to that of scientific endeavour in western cultures. Rather than look externally to themselves, they have turned inwards. They have sought to learn about reality by understanding more of the part of themselves that perceives reality – that is, the mind. In Western science, because the focus of interest has been on the external world, researchers would pay close attention to aspects of the world outside of themselves. This resulted in developing instruments and technology that would allow better observations and measurements to be made. In eastern cultures, because the focus of interest was on the internal world, they searched for methods that would allow them to pay close attention to what was happening there. Their internal world included thoughts, feelings, images, dreams, and other sub-conscious processes. None of these could be directly detected from the outside; they could only be perceived by the person experiencing them. These were not amenable to study by the methods of Western science; different methods had to be applied, using processes of introspection rather than extrospection.

From this motivation, the practice of meditation was developed. At an early stage of conscious introspection, it was realised that focusing attention internally was not easy. One of two consequences tended to occur. Either the chattering of the mind was so active that it was difficult to discover what was going on underneath the surface; or alternatively, the mind would relax so much that sleep would result. What was required were techniques that would still the mind, allowing for clarity, whilst staying fully aware. When that state of consciousness was reached, it was claimed that aspects of reality could be experienced that otherwise were unattainable.

In eastern cultures, these methods were practised and refined over many hundreds of years. When the Buddha was born, techniques had been developed that allowed a person to achieve a mind that was profoundly still and clear, and could be turned in any direction. When a brilliant young man or woman was considering what to do with their lives, they were encouraged to go to a monastery. It was felt that the most worthwhile activity they could engage in was to learn how to transform their minds. The Buddha, brought up in such a culture, used this methodology to explore consciousness.

Although Buddhism is often perceived in the west to be a religion, Wallace argued that this is a misconception. Buddhism does have a spiritual dimension – but he asserted that it is also a science and a philosophy. The aim of the Buddha was to integrate theoretical understanding with experience. This is done by each person focusing on their own internal experience of the mind. In the west, cognitive scientists are exploring consciousness – but not usually through self study. Rather, they examine the brain, and identify what correlates there are between what is happening to the brain, and the images that appear on scanning technology. In addition, almost all studies are done on brain damaged people, or on students who are used as a control group. There is no investigation into what creates an exceptional mind.

The Buddha was concerned with what was a desirable state of mind. He recognised that people sought genuine happiness – what he termed ‘eudemonia’, which can be translated as human flourishing. He saw the main block to this as being human suffering.

The Buddha said that if one trains the mind there is joy, and if the mind is undisciplined there is suffering. In this way the Buddha placed great emphasis on the mind. Thus, the basis that is to be purified is the mind. If it is trained, there is *nirvana*, or liberation, and if it is not trained, one continues in the cycle of existence known as *samsara*. (His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, in Wallace 2003: 93)

Thus, what he sought was a means to bring suffering to an end, as detailed in the Four Noble Truths.

Considerable work is now being undertaken to integrate both the methods and the findings of science and Buddhism. The Dalai Lama himself acts as a role model. He believes that science, and spiritual understanding such as that developed through Buddhism, should be complementary.

From a Buddhist perspective the reason for engaging in (careful investigation into Buddhist beliefs) is not simply to gain greater knowledge about the world. Rather, our goal is to bring about a transformation in the mind. This doesn't

occur simply by prayer or by wishing that the mind will change. The mind isn't transformed by that alone but rather by ascertaining various facets of reality. For example, if you have a certain assumption about reality, and you subject this assumption to investigation and consequently find evidence that invalidates your prior assumption, then the more you focus on this evidence the more the previous assumption will decrease in power, and the power of your fresh insight will increase. Thus, most good qualities of the mind accord with reality, which is to say, they are reasonable. They are grounded upon sound evidence. **The mind is transformed when one ascertains and thoroughly acquaints oneself with fresh insights into the nature of reality that invalidate one's previous misconceptions or false assumptions.** (ibid: 95-96, emphasis added)

Despite this emphasis on an understanding of reality being based on thorough investigation and sound evidence, Western science would not validate it, because subjective experiences were being accepted as primary data. Such an approach was not permissible within a discipline that equated scientific knowledge with objective knowledge; even when a different approach might achieve a better understanding of consciousness. Wallace talks of a conference sponsored by the Royal Society in London in 1994 entitled *Consciousness – Its Place in Contemporary Science*.

When one participant suggested that research into consciousness must include the first-person perspective, a number of his colleagues expressed consternation. In their eyes, avoiding the taboo of subjectivity and remaining ignorant of consciousness was apparently preferable to breaking that taboo and opening the possibility of fresh avenues of understanding. (Wallace 2000: 75)

In *Buddhism and Science*, Matthew Ricard:

presents the outlines for a contemplative science that would rectify this problem by introducing sophisticated means of exploring and transforming the mind firsthand through sustained contemplative training. Taking the Buddhist contemplative tradition as a model for such a science, he points out that the fundamental aim of contemplative science is to understand the mind through direct experience. And the function of such knowledge is to purify the mind of its "affliction", such as craving, hatred, and deluded self-centredness, and thereby discover a state of genuine well-being. Such happiness is not a stimulus-driven pleasure, not even an intellectual or aesthetic joy, but a way of flourishing that stems from our deepest nature as human beings. That nature, according to Buddhism, is "pure awareness", the experience of which enables one to transcend self-centredness and open to a deep sense of altruism. (Ricard 2003: 259)

In a world where hatred and self-centredness exist in abundance, and where there is no place in science for such issues to be addressed, surely it is time to look at an expansion of science which includes a study of consciousness, from first person as well as third person perspectives.

Chapter 15

Drawing Threads Together

It would seem that the way forward which carries most hope of finding ways of understanding and resolving the experience of pain, suffering and violence, and to discover a way of knowing that enables life to be experienced as deeply meaningful, is to develop a science of consciousness that includes first and second as well as third person methods of research, and includes experiences of a spiritual reality.

As I came to write this chapter, I stopped for a while, and took a look around at what was going on in the world at this point in time. Given that it was issues to do with pain, suffering and violence which had triggered my inquiry, could I say over a third of a century on, that these were less in evidence than when I started? My immediate and unequivocal response was, that I could not.

There were still, for example, major issues relating to the quality of life for children in care. Libby Purves, writing in *The Times*, discussed the plight of children in the care system, including Gareth Myatt, aged fifteen, under 5 feet in height, and weighing less than 7 stone, who died last April being restrained by two men and a woman.

Children from the age of 12, can be controlled with sharp pain, routinely stripped naked, have their genitals forcibly examined and be shut in bare cells without natural light, furniture or lavatory. Such force happens a dozen times every week, across the country. ...Suicides such as that of 14-year old Adam Rickwood, last month, bring only rueful headshaking. He was the youngest person to die in state custody in any Western democracy in modern times..... We assume – what with the UN convention on the rights of the child and the Human Rights Act – that children (in Secure Training Centres) get adequate education, exercise, and socialisation. We assume that they will come out having learnt, by example and precept, valuable lessons of civilised behaviour. We are wrong. Nearly a third of inmates who leave these training centres re-offend within a month. And not only have two children died in Secure Training Centres – and 25 more in mainstream prisons since 1990 – but things are actually getting worse.

There are 2,800 children in custody. They may behave like little swine, they may be lippy and lairy and half off their heads but they are in our care. Many of them have only ever experienced chaotic lives and casual violence: custody should be an introduction to civilised values and human respect. And it rarely is. We ought to care, not just out of human kindness, but because if we do not care, and do not make it a live political issue which governments do not ignore, we are storing up hideous trouble for the future. (Purves 2004)

In stating the necessity of focusing on the well-being and care of all children, in order to prevent further damage being inflicted both on them and by them in the longer term,

Purves was saying nothing different to what I and many, many others have been saying for decades. I would suggest that we do not have to wait till the future for the 'hideous trouble' to emerge; it is right here in the present. Open any national paper, any day of the week, and there are reports of shootings, murders, and other brutal conflicts. People living in many parts of the country fear for their safety and even for their lives, due to the high levels of violence and crime that exist in their localities.

So why, despite so many political initiatives and public outcries, has there been no successful resolution to these enormous problems? I return again to my contention that it is due in large part to the dominant worldview in our culture; to the fact that people see the world as described by Newtonian classical science; they see individuals within the world as separate, and divided into 'us and them', not allowing for the possibility that such perceptions may be an illusion. They do not recognise the interconnectedness of all, as implied by quantum physics; they are not aware of the implications of a 'participatory universe', where every action and decision made by each individual has an influence on the nature of the whole society; as reciprocally, the norms, values and beliefs of a society makes an impact on the quality of life and opportunities for each individual. So, any time we allow a child to get into or remain in a situation where they feel abandoned, alone, rejected or alienated from their surroundings, we are acting in a way that runs the risk of them behaving violently. To repeat a quotation from Masters:

To be part of (the) world, the child must feel that his existence is beneficent, productive of good. If it is not, then he (shall) withdraw. ...If the child grows into a man who cannot relate in any obvious way, he will find an aberrant way to relate, through cruelty, or sadism, or control, or ultimately through destruction. Complete isolation becomes in the end unbearable.
(Masters 1993: 40-42)

I do not believe there has been much if any progress made by societies in the Western world, including Britain, in understanding their collective responsibility in creating the conditions in which all people live – including children.

Looking at countries beyond the West provided an even more dismal picture. People across the world were in continual fear of terrorist attacks. The consequences of the Iraqi war raged on, with people killed on a daily basis through gunfire and terrorist attacks. As I wrote, Kenneth Bigley, a British engineer, was being held hostage by the extremist Tawid and Jihad group, with his two American work colleagues having been beheaded the previous week. The videos of the killing were put on the internet for public viewing: terrorists were learning to use sophisticated photo-technology for their own destructive ends. Doubts were being expressed as to whether the levels of violence would allow for proper democratic elections to be held in Iraq as planned in the New Year. Earlier in the month, there was the Beslan massacre, where over 300 children and adults were killed as a consequence of Chechen rebels storming a Russian school, and holding over 1,500 people hostage for a number of days. The conflict between Israel and Palestine festered on; survivors of the Janjaweed sought to find ways to stay alive in Darfur. Even the Americans did not feel insulated from attack after the destruction of the twin towers on 11th September 2001.

It would be very easy to feel pessimistic about all that was going on; to listen to those who say 'it is in human nature to be aggressive'; or, 'violent and evil people have existed throughout history, and we can do nothing to change that'. If I believed in that, then I would indeed be negative. Yet despite these continuing high levels of pain, suffering and violence, manifested in so many different ways, I cannot feel completely pessimistic. The separatists have dominated our world for too long; but this way of understanding life is not the only one that exists; we are ready for a change. We do not know what would happen if a critical mass of the population were to experience a 'shift in consciousness', and live in this world continuously holding a perception of an interconnected web, in which everyone and every thing is of value; realising that to denigrate or damage another is to denigrate and damage self and the whole.

There are times when I can feel that possibly I am being too idealistic or unrealistic. Perhaps I am. Perhaps the world will continue with the same levels of pain, suffering and violence until the end of its natural existence or until it self-destructs. If that is the case, then I feel so much for my daughter's children, and their children, and all future generations to come. However, believing this goes against every single intuitive sense I have, and against my own experience. My proposition is that we could possibly be involved in an evolution of consciousness which may at some stage involve a transformation of consciousness. I cannot accept that the world came into creation to stay at its current level of consciousness. There surely has to be more.

There are two strong indicators which I believe provide evidence that there may be validity in my hypothesis. The first is my own experience. In my early twenties, I felt depressed, isolated, at times doubted my sanity, had few friends, and often felt part of a fragmented, meaningless universe. I could understand what it was like to feel suicidal. I had addictive tendencies that on some level I knew were symptoms of personal pain expressed in a form damaging to myself. Through the writings of depth psychologists which led me into journaling, I developed a practice that gave me a feeling of connection with a 'wider reality'; I no longer felt so fragmented and alone. This gave me the basis and courage to go more into the world, and develop friendships; I came to feel more connected with people in 'this world'. As I continued the journey, I faced hard and challenging times; but now I had a basis to build on. I experienced a spiritual resilience which emerged from my sense of a loving dynamic energy with limitless creative potential. I learned through experience, that what I held in my consciousness influenced the reality that emerged. Even at times when I despaired, felt depressed, or feared the worst, if I could connect into that wider loving consciousness, life would build rather than disintegrate. I became part of a 'working group' that was also a friendship group; we gave each other the support required to live hopefully and creatively in this world where so much suffering and pain exists.

The other factor that provides evidence to support my hypothesis is that I see the journey I and my co-travellers are taking is also being followed by many others in many parts of the world. There are books and articles being published which indicate that a real shift in consciousness is taking place; and an acknowledgement that the source of our problems lies in our lack of understanding of consciousness. The 'advanced' Western world has historically taken as read the source of all thoughts, ideas, feelings and action; and has focused on gaining more information about the external world. In so doing, a desire to command and manipulate that external world to our own selfish ends has been a dominant motive of much action, resulting in competition for control.

Inevitably such action leads to conflict and power struggles, with the abuse, violence and exploitation this generates. For as long as people perceive the cosmos to consist totally of three-dimensional terrain where consciousness is an emergent and dependent property, where there are inevitably winners and losers, and each person seeks to be a winner, then the violence and destruction will continue.

However, there is a growing recognition that this perception of the cosmos is a distorted one; and the distortion starts with and in consciousness itself. In order to understand ourselves fully, and our place in the universe, then we have to both experience and understand the subjective experience of consciousness in a different way. As I have suggested earlier, one way of approaching this is through exploring the idea of an ‘evolution of consciousness’. Nobel laureate George Wald identified this as a means of addressing scientific tensions arising out of the challenge to Newtonian science as far back as 1984:

In my life as a scientist I have come upon two major problems which, though rooted in science, though they would occur in this form only to a scientist, project beyond science, and are I think ultimately insoluble as science. That is hardly to be wondered at, since one involves consciousness and the other, cosmology...This is with the assumption that mind, rather than emerging as a late outgrowth in the evolution of life, has existed always as the matrix, the source and condition of physical reality – that the stuff of which physical reality is composed is mind-stuff. It is mind that has composed a physical universe that breeds life, and so eventually evolves creatures that know and create ...in them the universe begins to know itself. Also, such creatures develop societies and cultures – institutions that present all the essential conditions for evolution by natural selection- so **introducing an evolution of consciousness** parallel with, though independent of, anatomical and physiological evolution. (Wade 1996: 2, emphasis added)

Traditional science has focused on understanding the world from an objective, third person perspective; however, consciousness requires that we include a subjective, first person perspective. Jorge Ferrer suggests:

Aspects belonging to the structures of subjectivity can reach out and become, in a way, objects for consciousness in the external world.In transpersonal and spiritual development, new worlds of corresponding objects and meanings *actually* emerge as consciousness evolves and identifies itself with new structures of subjectivity. This idea receives support from many contemplative traditions such as Vajrayana Buddhism or Kabbalah, which maintain that inner spiritual practices are not merely aimed at changing the self, but at the actual transformation of the world. For example, according to Kukai, founder of Shingon Buddhism, the world is a manifestation of the cosmic Buddha that, depending on the state of mind of the viewer, “actually takes form not only as different world views, but also as different worlds”. (Ferrer 2002: 31)

This, of course, is completely in accord with the findings from quantum physics, which demonstrates that the subjective intention of the observer influences the nature of the reality that emerges.

Barbara Marx Hubbard is just one person who, in creating the *Foundation for Conscious Evolution* in California, is gathering together groups of people to explore these issues. She sees:

The emergence of conscious evolutionaries happening at a global scale. You find such people in every faith, every tradition, every race, every culture, and every economic background. This type of person seems to transcend ordinary classifications and boundaries. The quality that distinguishes evolutionary consciousness is that you feel the emergent potential within yourself, and you are driven with a passion as great as the desire for self-preservation and self-expression for the sake of yourself and the world.

By choosing to consciously participate in this experiment rather than merely being a passive witness, we can identify ourselves with the conscious 'force' seeking to manifest through evolution, developing our untapped co-creative potential. **In my own efforts at self-evolution, I hold three aspects of consciousness in my heart simultaneously: I am an expression of the whole story of creation; I am a vital participant in expressing my creativity to serve that evolution and my own evolution; and thirdly, I am one with source. This is evolutionary consciousness.** (Hubbard 2003, emphasis added)

Ferrer, in his book, *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory*, argues a case for developing a different means of understanding the totality of human experience, including that of spiritual dimensions:

Transpersonal realities can never be adequately or accurately described by intellectually confident assessments and rankings of the multiplicity of humanity's spiritual paths and perspectives measured against a single pre-given universal Reality. They can be approached, rather, only by a much more subtly intelligent and more heartfelt dialogical engagement with the Mystery that is source of all – hence, by a dialogical engagement with each other in respectful openness to the diversity of wisdom's self-disclosures, and a dialogical engagement with one's interior being and with the cosmos itself, in reverent openness to the irreducible depths of its mystery, intelligence, and power. Such knowledge is an act of the heart as much as it is an act of the mind, the two inextricably linked. (Ferrer 2002: xiv)

Developing a comprehensive science of consciousness, which aims to incorporate as valid areas for study all aspects of subjective experience, including intimations of a non-material 'spiritual' reality is not going to be easy. Developing it in such a way that there is an explicit commitment towards creating knowledge and action in the interest of addressing social problems, and transforming the world, rather than for gaining knowledge for its own sake, will require an even greater shift in attitude and attention.

Many people feel that the path will be too long, too hard, and probably not possible. I accept the path is not easy; but I am reminded of the story of the man looking for keys under the streetlight, because that was the easiest place for him to search. He did not look in the area where he had dropped them, because it was dark, and they would have been too hard to find. The consequence is - if he never faces the challenge of the dark, he will never find the keys. It seems to me that science, in concentrating on the external world alone, has focused on that which is more easily observable, controllable and manageable. However, we now urgently need a new form of knowledge. Each and

every person who joins in this process adds to the hope; each person who rejects the possibility, diminishes it.

An important learning for me in this enquiry is that no one person can discover the 'truth' on their own. This is indeed a collaborative inquiry, which requires people from different backgrounds and theoretical perspectives to be prepared to enter into a true dialogue with each other, where the listening to others is valued equally as much as the contribution one has to make. The Sufi tale of the blind men and the elephant provides a useful analogy. An elephant arrived as part of a travelling group at a village, where no elephants had been seen before. A group of blind men heard him, and wanted to know what it was like. They all felt it. One man felt the trunk, and said: "it's a snake". Another felt its broad smooth side, and said: "it's a wall". A third felt its ear, and thought it was a fan. The fourth felt its tail, and believed it was a frayed bit of rope. The result was confusion. Each one was sure he was right, and could only refer to it in terms of things he already knew. However, if they had accepted each other's experiences, and aimed, by collating their stories, to see what kind of fuller picture arose, they may have been able to get a more comprehensive picture of the actual reality.

There are destructive forces at work in the world. There are also positive, life-giving, life affirming ones. By sharing the stories of the principles and experiences that have shaped our individual stories so far; by making positive choices about what we hold in our consciousness and how we 'live in each present moment'; and by seeking to build a mutually created, collaborative story, that has the vision of 'transforming the world through transforming self', we can perhaps develop a science of consciousness that allows us to become whole; and hopefully allows us to learn how to live in peace and harmony with each other.

PART II

2004 - 2008

Transition

Three years have passed since completing Part I of my thesis. Writing it up was a relatively intense process, and I wanted to leave some time before creating a final section, to be able to evaluate what I had written ‘from a distance’. I also needed to ask, not only ‘Had I found a way of knowing that satisfied my search for meaning?’; but in telling my story, had I communicated my learning in a way that demonstrated sufficient evidence of “originality of mind” and “critical judgement” to satisfy doctoral requirements?

In evaluating my search for answers to core life questions, I felt it important that my ‘way of knowing’ met the following criteria:

1. It connected with my deepest sense of self.
2. It connected with the ideas and experiences of others in the external world.
3. It enabled me to create a reality for myself that integrated my inner and outer worlds.

In this final section, I return to these issues, and reflect on them.

In Chapter 16, I reflect on a quality that I discovered in the early part of my enquiry, and of which I have become increasingly aware during the last three years – that of ‘spiritual resilience’; a sense of inner strength which enables me to face substantial pressure and stress without it adversely affecting my behaviour and health. In exploring this, I believe I am offering spiritual resilience as a new standard of judgment which has been gained through a continuing and sustaining experience of a ‘loving dynamic energy with limitless creative possibilities’. I discuss the nature and reality of this contention in relation to writings of Viktor Frankl.

In Chapter 17 I locate my search for responses to core life questions concerning meaning and purpose within a historical and cultural context, and suggest that my personal enquiry is reflecting a much wider one.

In Chapter 18, I expand on my ‘way of knowing’, including an exploration of issues concerning validity.

In Chapter 19, I meet again with members of the Transformative Living Inquiry Group. They work with me to explore what our learning has been, and how this learning contributes to the questions being explored in my thesis. Using video clips, I seek to use a visual means of communicating the significance of the meanings I am creating.

In Chapter 20, I look at work that I am currently doing on Leadership in my professional role, as a means of demonstrating how inner and outer, theory and practice, professional and personal, spiritual and intellectual, are each integrated within a specific process of development and learning.

Finally, in Chapter 21, I return to my starting point – the issues of meaning and purpose, pain and suffering; with particular reference to the continuing value of seeking to integrate findings from quantum physics with contemplative and meditative practices within the Buddhist tradition.

Chapter 16

Spiritual Resilience

As I have 'lived my theory' over the past three years, and have continued to both experience and observe the various challenges that life throws at me and others, the notion of 'spiritual resilience' is one that has become experientially very significant to me. I wanted to explore what this meant to me in greater depth, in relation to my sense that my way of knowing included a trust in a loving, dynamic energy, and a feeling of being interconnected within a whole, within an ultimate unity.

One emergence that I have noticed as I have stayed with my enquiry questions in the process of responding to life's challenges, has been the development of what I have termed 'spiritual resilience'; that is, that over time, there has been an increase in my ability to stay calm, retain a sense of 'wholeness', and experience less fear and anxiety when events happen which appear to threaten my physical or psychological security. It feels to me as though this spiritual resilience emerges from my sense of a loving dynamic energy, which holds limitless creative possibilities and potential.

I have recognised this as an outcome of my spiritual practice, which is in keeping with a wide range of research findings into the consequences of regular meditation:

Equanimity is regarded in many contemplative traditions as both a first result of meditation and as a necessary basis for spiritual growth.Contemporary researchers, however, have only begun to chart the gradations and varieties of such experience. Kornfield (1979), for example, reported that mindfulness practice frequently enhances adaptation to a large range of fluctuating experiences. Goleman (1978-79) discussed the tranquillity of mind and body and the greater behavioral stability reported by meditators.
(Murphy 2007 Ch.4)

I found, though, that there seems to be a dynamic relationship between what I term spiritual resilience, and times of crises. I discovered this particularly through my experience of Jerry's death. My psychological resilience was severely challenged at that time; at one stage on the way to a weekend retreat, I know I was close to a breakdown. Having managed to survive up till then, much happened during that weekend to give me the strength to continue; not only the spiritual nourishment that came from being in the company of others on the retreat, especially during the part of the weekend when everyone moved around and ate in contemplative silence; but it included my picking up the leaflet about the Scientific and Medical Network, which was to provide the opening to so much else. Was this all 'chance'? I have written about my experience of synchronicity and my understanding of it as the meaningful coinciding of the physical and the psyche; so no, the findings of my enquiry to date suggest that this did not all happen by chance. My experience feels confirmatory of a spiritual reality; which in turn provides support for my sense that there is meaning and

purpose to what I do; which in turn provides me with a deeper strength when faced with apparently threatening and fearful situations: in other words, spiritual resilience.

I have sometimes wondered, though, whether this would continue under the most severe of circumstances. Whatever challenges I personally face, they are not obviously comparable to many I hear or read about; for example, those who experience painful and life-threatening illnesses; or who are submitted to extreme torture or violent sexual abuse. Is it possible for the spiritual resilience I talk about to be sustaining in those kinds of circumstances? I have often wondered how feasible it is for this kind of resilience to uphold under such extreme conditions.

I found a certain response to this when reading Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (1964). Frankl was a psychotherapist, who spent three years in concentration camps from 1942 till 1945, including Auschwitz and Dachau. He lived in conditions that fostered and encouraged physical and psychological destruction, to the extent that only one person in twenty-eight survived. Despite this, he could still testify to the resilience and splendour of the human spirit; and to the ability of that spirit to remain free and make choices as to how to manifest its humanity in each and every present moment. Not only this, but he found that it was still possible to find meaning in such circumstances. At a later date, when writing about his learning influenced by his time in the concentration camps, he suggests that whereas Freudian psychoanalysis states people are motivated to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and Adlerian psychology focuses on people's desire to seek status and power, he believed that people are in fact primarily motivated by the need to find meaning in their lives. He says: "Where do we hear of that which most deeply inspires man; where is the innate desire to give as much meaning as possible to one's life, to actualise as many values as possible?"

Frankl's writing demonstrates that people are able to find meaning and a reason for surviving even in circumstances that include extreme and sustained suffering. This suggests to me that whatever source we originate from, we have the capacity, should we choose to search for and find it, to draw from that source a level of spiritual resilience that defies rational explanation. I have certainly found evidence for this theory in my own experience.

Frankl looked at meaning from two different perspectives. On a day-to-day level, he consistently maintained that people's greatest psychological requirement was to find meaning and purpose in their existence, it was their primary motivational force. However, he also believed that no one person could tell another what their purpose was; each person had to find out what that was for themselves, and accept the responsibility that accompanied the realisation. If someone could do that, they would continue to psychologically flourish. Frankl would quote Nietzsche, who said: "He who has a *why* to live can bear almost any *how*".

He suggests that:

The meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected.
(1964:157)

Further, he thought that this meaning should be concrete.

One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out; a concrete assignment which demands fulfilment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it. (ibid: 113)

However, Frankl also considered where this 'here and now' question concerning the meaning of life stood in relation to the much bigger philosophical questions concerning the ultimate meaning and purpose of the universe. He asks:

Are you sure that the human world is a terminal point in the evolution of the cosmos? Is it not conceivable that there is still another dimension, a world beyond man's world; a world in which the question of an ultimate meaning of human suffering would find an answer?

Frankl responds to his own question:

This ultimate meaning necessarily exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of man; (we could call this) super-meaning. What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms.

Frankl too is acknowledging the intangible mystery that appears to be intrinsic to life. But also, his own experience suggested to him that this spiritual reality that would give meaning to his suffering did exist, even if he could not provide empirical evidence to support the belief that arose out of the experience. It seems to me that if we lived in a culture that was less influenced by scientism, his sheer ability to withstand such conditions over a number of years would be powerful enough to count as 'evidence' of some kind of sustaining spiritual force which supports human embodied existence.

In reading about Frankl's experiences, I encountered many parts of his story that connect with my own discoveries through my lived enquiry. One of these was a synchronistic experience when his internal thoughts and feelings resonate with (apparently) unrelated external events. Frankl's account is as follows:

Another time we were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the *reason* for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious 'Yes' in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. "*Et lux in tenebris lucet*" – and the light shineth in the darkness. For hours I stood hacking at the icy ground. The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and

grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was *there*. Then, at that very moment, a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me. (ibid: 51-52)

Another account is of his conversation with a young woman, who before coming into concentration camp had had no commitment to a spiritual path; and would have appeared to have lived a life which would have been unable to withstand extreme suffering with any level of fortitude. However, Frankl tells the following story:

Some details of a particular man's inner greatness may have come to one's mind, like the story of the young woman whose death I witnessed in a concentration camp. This young woman knew that she would die in the next few days. But when I talked to her she was cheerful in spite of this knowledge. "I am grateful that fate has hit me so hard," she told me. "In my former life I was spoiled and did not take spiritual accomplishments seriously". Pointing through the window of the hut, she said, "This tree here is the only friend I have in my loneliness". Through that window she could see just one branch of a chestnut tree, and on the branch were two blossoms. "I often talk to this tree," she said to me. I was startled and didn't quite know how to take her words. Was she delirious? Did she have occasional hallucinations? Anxiously I asked her if the tree replied. "Yes". What did it say to her? She answered, "It said to me, "I am here – I am here – I am life, eternal life." (ibid: 77-78)

In her extreme suffering, and close to death, she seems to have experienced the sense of unity with all things, the interconnection between all forms of life within the natural world; and to have gained strength from that experience. To hear these words from someone who did not appear to have a previous inclination to follow a 'spiritual path' suggests that when we reach the core of our being, whatever triggers that happening, there is a strong spiritual support system in place that is sustaining whatever the circumstances; that creates a spiritual resilience. That has been my experience; and my reading of Frankl, writing about those most extreme of conditions, suggests that this is an integral element of our human condition, if we make the choice to find it.

Chapter 17

Exploring Questions of Meaning and Purpose

Writers and thinkers coming from different traditions and disciplines, including philosophy, religion, science, depth psychology and transpersonal psychology, have wide-ranging responses to core life questions. I locate my own search for meaning within this wider historical and cultural context in which my enquiry is located.

The pursuit of truth

My initial enquiry question was triggered by my experience of looking after children in care, and is repeated again here:

“How can I gain the knowledge I need to better help these young people, who are experiencing extreme emotional pain and suffering as a result of damaging and abusive experiences, which has led to them being removed from the family home, and put in the care of salaried staff such as myself?”

In the middle of the depression that developed as a consequence of my feelings of ignorance and inadequacy, I found myself intensely questioning the meaning and purpose of life as a whole, and of my life in particular. I already knew that it was not easy to find answers to difficult questions; I had become aware at an early age that people had very different theoretical foundations for deciding what constituted ‘truth’.

Jostein Gaarder, who wrote *Sophie's World*, a novel covering the history of philosophy, identifies such questions as ‘Who are you?’ and ‘Where does the world come from?’ I add to these the questions that impacted on me, including : “Is there a specific purpose and meaning to my life? If so, how can I know what they are; and how can I learn to best achieve them?”

It is one of life’s enigmas as to why some people feel compelled to actively explore such issues, whereas others seem to see no point or value in doing so. Being in the former group, it has always felt to me to be important to continue with enquiring, even though I was well aware that precise answers were not going to be forthcoming. In this respect, I have been influenced by Socrates, who realised that he knew little, and needed to place emphasis on learning rather than claiming to know. Gaarder writes:

Mankind is faced with a number of difficult questions that we have no satisfactory answers to. So now two possibilities present themselves: We can either fool ourselves and the rest of the world by pretending that we know all there is to know, or we can shut our eyes to the central issues once and for all and abandon all progress. In this sense, humanity is divided. People are, generally speaking, either dead certain or totally indifferent. It is like dividing a deck of cards into two piles. You lay the black cards in one pile and the red

in the other. But from time to time a joker turns up that is neither heart nor club, neither diamond nor spade. Socrates was this joker in Athens. He was neither certain nor indifferent. All he knew was that he knew nothing – and it troubled him. So he became a philosopher – someone who does not give up but tirelessly pursues his quest for truth. (2005: 54)

Vernon also considers the influence of Socrates when exploring what it is possible to know. He summarises a speech (2007: 20) that Socrates makes in the *Apology*, an early dialogue written by Plato, which reflects his philosophical creed:

Socrates, then, believed that the key to wisdom was self-understanding. An inscription on the temple at Delphi says “Know thyself” – which for Socrates became the imperative to understand oneself. However, it posed the fundamental question about how it is possible to understand oneself, whilst at the same time recognising and accepting the essential uncertainty of the human condition.

For if the human condition is one of uncertainty, then the question, ‘who am I?’ is frightening. It is elusive and will never, finally, be settled. It is for this reason that the ‘how’ of knowing oneself often gives way to the ‘how’ of ‘how should one live?’ The latter’s practicalities provide comfort in the face of daunting existential crisis. (ibid: 25)

So Socrates encouraged a process of enquiry and of learning which then helped shape decisions about how to live; rather than expecting people to submit and conform to a pre-given set of rules and standards.

However, as Vernon says:

One does not need to learn much more of this philosophical tradition that manifested itself as the cultivation of a way of life before an obvious question springs to mind. How is it that what is usually taken as philosophy today seems so different? Why does it apparently make so little demand upon the modern philosopher’s person (beyond the development of rational techniques, thought and intellectual know-how)? Philosophers may try to live ethically, as in having good reason for what they do. But rarely is philosophy taken as being total in the sense of the ancients – a practice that seeks to shape the individual, heart and mind. No professor today would say to his or her students (even less to his or her funders), it is not my lectures or publications that count, but what I am becoming! (ibid: 154)

It is philosophy in this ancient sense of the word that I am interested in; I seek an understanding of myself and the world that is not just theoretical, but makes a difference to how I live my life. The question as to whether there was fundamental meaning and purpose to life was a common thread running throughout my enquiry, which lay at the foundation of all other questions. I could relate to Frankl when he states: “Striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man” (1964: 104). My personal experience is that satisfactorily addressing questions of meaning and purpose is central to my well-being; and there is a direct relationship between my responses to these questions, and the levels of energy and motivation I have to fully engage with day to day living.

What I had not realised until the later stages of my enquiry, and possibly not fully until I was reading and reflecting on the first draft of my 'story', was the extent to which my personal confusion and uncertainty concerning such questions of meaning and purpose were mirroring what had happened and was happening in the external world. Consequently, I wanted as part of my enquiry to locate within a wider historical and cultural context what I had generally experienced as rather a lone struggle. In so doing, I have become aware that my experience is in fact symptomatic of the place and time in which I am living.

The following is an account of where this particular strand of my research has taken me.

Religion as the source of truth and meaning

Probably religion can be identified as the force that has been most influential in claiming to both know the truth and provide life with meaning. Although religion has claimed to know the truth, this is now commonly disputed by people who are not members of a religious community. However, what is generally not disputed is that religion provides people with a meaning and purpose to life, including a belief in some form of continuing existence after this embodied life. It was not until science arrived on the scene that the issue of meaning became so challenging.

Religion has a long tradition and history across the globe. However, in the present context, it was what was happening immediately before the Enlightenment that is relevant. The main point to be made is that 'God' was seen in various, and sometimes contradictory ways, including as a God of Love and a God of Wrath. Although religions are based largely on faith, many people have over the ages attempted to represent their beliefs as though they were fact.

Karen Armstrong, though, in her extensive survey of the three monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, states that a history of God has to be about the way men and women have perceived him, as it is not possible to speak the 'truth' about God; there is no means of identifying the 'ineffable reality of God' (Armstrong 1999: 4), no way of perceiving him as an objective reality.

Ambivalent perceptions of God were reflected by Martin Luther:

Because God was eternal and omnipotent, 'his fury or wrath towards self-satisfied sinners is also immeasurable and infinite'. His will was past finding out. Observance of the Law of God or the rules of a religious order could not save us. Indeed the Law could only bring accusation and terror, because it showed us the measure of our inadequacy. Instead of bringing a message of hope, the Law revealed 'the wrath of God, sin, death and damnation in the sight of God'. (Armstrong 1999: 318)

Luther himself dealt with this bleak perspective in his acceptance of the view that God saves us despite our sins.

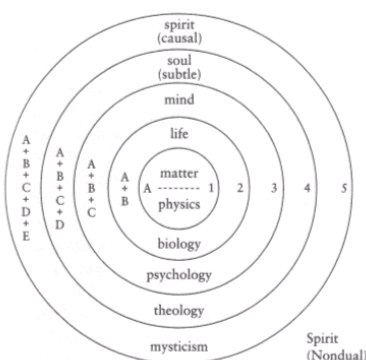
There was nothing new about Luther's theory: it had been current in Europe since the early fourteenth century. But once Luther had grasped it and made it his own, he felt his anxieties fall away. The revelation that ensued 'made me

feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself". (ibid: 319)

In reality, what are seen to be religious truths vary between religions, within the same religion, and across different times. There is generally no evidential truth to support or negate any one religious perspective over another. Yet despite this, religions have been practised across all cultures and ages. Armstrong states:

My study of the history of religion has revealed that human beings are spiritual animals. Indeed, there is a case for arguing that *Homo sapiens* is also *Homo religiosus*. Men and women started to worship gods as soon as they became recognisably human; they created religions at the same time as they created works of art. This was not simply because they wanted to propitiate powerful forces but these early faiths expressed the wonder and mystery that seems always to have been an essential component of this beautiful yet terrifying world. Like art, religion has been an attempt to find meaning and value in life, despite the suffering that flesh is heir to. (ibid: 3)

Ken Wilber (1998) states that historically, virtually all the world's religions and great wisdom traditions subscribe to a belief in the Great Chain of Being. According to this view, reality is a tapestry of interwoven levels, reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Each level enfolds the next level – Wilber prefers the terms Great Nest of Being, as this better conveys the idea of one level 'nesting' within an other. In his terminology, spirit transcends but includes soul, which transcends but includes mind, which transcends but includes the vital body, which transcends but includes matter. Different disciplines study different elements of the 'nest'. He represents his Great Nest of Being in the following diagram.



(Wilber, 1998: 8)

Wilber suggests that, although every major civilisation in the history of humanity has recognised some version of the Great Chain of Being, this has changed in the modern Western world since the age of Enlightenment. Science, through its methods of prediction, experimentation and control, has reduced the world to matter.

The rise of Newtonian science and the materialist worldview

The Enlightenment and the rise of science represented a truly transformative shift in Western culture. The new scientific spirit was empirical, based solely on observation, experimentation, measurement and verification. The rapid advancements in technology and medicine demonstrated that its methods worked; and soon these methods were considered to be essential in the generation of all knowledge. Only processes such as those found to be so successful in science could be seen to be credible.

The old ‘proofs’ for God’s existence were no longer entirely satisfactory and natural scientists and philosophers, full of enthusiasm for the empirical method, felt compelled to verify the objective reality of God in the same way as they proved other demonstrable phenomena. (Armstrong 1999: 341)

Because such proofs were not available, atheism – the belief there is no God or gods – began to spread. Philosophers, scientists and other great thinkers created interpretations of reality which had no place for God – including Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud.

However, despite the benefits brought by science, there were major costs also – certainly in issues to do with meaning and purpose. If the materialist assumptions of classical science are followed through to their logical conclusions, then there is a huge case for pessimism and despair. Blaise Pascal, a talented scientist of the seventeenth century, saw this at a very early stage:

When I see the blind and wretched state of man, when I survey the whole universe in its dumbness and man left to himself with no light, as though lost in this corner of the universe, without knowing who put him there, what he has come to do, what will become of him when he dies, incapable of knowing anything, I am moved to terror, like a man transported in his sleep to some terrifying desert island, who wakes up quite lost with no means of escape. Then I marvel that so wretched a state does not drive people to despair.
(1966: 3)

Nietzsche also did not seem to respond well to his atheism. After passionately believing that humans would be much better off without God, he wrote *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), in which he:

proclaimed the birth of Superman who would replace God. The new enlightened man would declare war upon the old Christian values, trample upon the base mores of the rabble and herald a new, powerful humanity which would have none of the feeble Christian virtues of love and pity.
(Armstrong 1999: 409)

However, he eventually went mad, and in *Zarathustra* (quoted in Armstrong 1999: 411) pleads with God to return:

No! come back,
With all your torments
Oh come back
To the last of all solitaires!
All the streams of my tears

Run their course for you!
 And the last flame of my heart –
 It burns up to *you*!
 Oh come back
 My unknown God! My pain! My last – happiness.

Wilber suggests that although science might be the means by which humans discover verifiable truth, religion remains the single greatest force for generating meaning. A major part of the problem is the fundamental reductionism of a science built on materialist assumptions. Huston Smith expresses the situation clearly:

It follows that accounting can proceed only from the bottom up – from inferior to superior, from less to more. Chronologically and developmentally the more comes after the less; causally it comes out of the less, the only other determining principle allowed being chance, which of course is a non-principle, the absence of a principle. Even when the higher has appeared, the thrust is to understand and interpret its workings in terms of the lower. The name for this mode of explanation is reductionism, (the belief that human activities can be “reduced” to and explained by the behaviour of lower animals, and that these in turn can be reduced to the physical laws that govern inanimate matter), and the growth of the Modern Western Mindset can be correlated with its advance. For Newton, stars became machines. For Descartes, animals were machines. For Hobbes society is a machine. For La Mettrie the human body is a machine. For Pavlov and Skinner, human behaviour is mechanical. (1998: 201)

If all that we are arises from matter, and is no more than matter, then it is difficult to identify any fundamental meaning and purpose in life; in fact given the nature of its principles, it is impossible. As Jacques Monod says:

The cornerstone of scientific method is ...the *systematic* denial that ‘true’ knowledge can be got at by interpreting phenomena in terms of final causes – that is to say of ‘purpose’. (1974: 21)

Smith is very clear about science’s inability to say anything about whether life is meaningful or not; it has no means of doing so.

It is as if the scientist were inside a large plastic balloon; he can shine his torch anywhere on the balloon’s interior, but cannot climb outside the balloon to view it as a whole, see where it is situated, or determine why it was fabricated. (1989: 85)

It also cannot force people to find its discoveries meaningful. So, having no relevance to questions of meaning, science:

Fails in the face of all ultimate questions” (Jaspers) and leaves “the problems of lifecompletely untouched” (Wittgenstein). “Only questions which cannot be answered with scientific precision have any real significance” (E.F. Schumacher). (ibid: 148)

Smith also points out that, not only can science not say anything about purpose and meaning, but it also is not able to deal with the matter of values.

It can say, for example, that smoking is detrimental to health, but it cannot say whether health is intrinsically more valuable than physiological gratification. It can identify what people actually like, but not with what they should like. Any question to do with socially desirable behaviour, or whether an action is morally justifiable cannot be answered by science. (ibid: 84)

Finally, it cannot measure qualities, cannot gain knowledge of anything that is not responsive to quantitative measurement.

It would seem, then, that in most psychological and spiritual issues that people face on a day to day basis, a materialist science (or scientism) is not in a position to comment; and certainly is incapable of developing a strong knowledge base that helps guide people's thinking and behaviour.

Such a utilitarian epistemology as science has created could be argued to be taking us more away from the truth than towards it. Professor Manfred Stanley certainly thought so, and spelt out very clearly what he saw as consequences of this split between matter and mind. He felt such a science left the world bereft.

It is by now a Sunday-supplement commonplace that the social, economic and technological modernisation of the world is accompanied by a spiritual malaise that has come to be called alienation. At its most fundamental level, the diagnosis of alienation is based on the view that modernisation forces upon us a world that, although baptised as real by science, is denuded of all humanly recognisable qualities; beauty and ugliness, love and hate, passion and fulfilment, salvation and damnation. It is not, of course, being claimed that such matters are not part of the existential realities of human life. It is rather that the scientific worldview makes it illegitimate to speak of them as being "objectively" part of the world, forcing us instead to define such evaluation and such emotional experiences as "merely subjective" projections of people's inner lives.

The world, once an "enchanted garden", to use Max Weber's memorable phrase, has now become disenchanted, deprived of purpose and direction, bereft – in these senses – of life itself. All that which is allegedly basic to the specifically human status in nature, comes to be forced back upon the precincts of the "subjective" which, in turn, is pushed by the modern scientific view ever more into the province of dreams and illusions.

The dehumanising price (of this outlook) is that our identities, freedom, norms, are no longer underwritten by our vision and comprehension of things. On the contrary, we are doomed to suffer from a tension between cognition (what we believe to be true) and identity (who we sense ourselves to be).
(1976: 115-116)

Robert Forman also felt that there are dire consequences from maintaining a split:

The modern focus on objectivity and the separation of science and spirituality, taken to fullness, leaves people separate from one another, separate from nature, and separate from the divine...

But by far the most insidious disappointment is that science and rationality just cannot provide meaning, value or the sense of fulfilment. Logic alone just cannot provide us with the sense that life is meaningful. (2004: 128)

This bleak view was not widely shared, however, and science achieved a golden age in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with extraordinary advances in all its major branches. There was a huge optimism in what science could accomplish, and a belief in its powers to improve indefinitely people's health and general welfare; and perhaps more importantly, to indefinitely increase the scope of human knowledge. No significance appeared to be attached to the implications of not being able to deal with questions of value, meaning, purpose and qualities. Science's claims to have valid knowledge of the world seemed scarcely questionable.

One of the main benefits offered by science was its ability to predict and control; and the more we were able to do that, the more power we could exert. In setting out to achieve this, science was responsible for shaping a world view that has become dominant in western culture. Smith phrased it as follows:

Worldviews arise from epistemologies which in turn are generated by the motivations that control them. In the seventeenth century, Europe hit on an epistemology (empiricism, the scientific method) that augmented its control dramatically – over nature to start with, but who knew where such control might eventually reach? This increase in our power pleased us to the point that we gave this way of knowing right of way. And with that move the die was cast with respect to worldview. Empiricism proceeds through sense knowledge, and that which connects with our senses is matter. ... (I would term) our modern Western worldview naturalism, this being defined as the view that (a) nothing that lacks a material component exists, and (b) in what does exist, the physical component has the final say. (1989: 197)

There were huge implications of this mindset for all parts of our lives:

While the West's "brain" rolls ever further down the reductionist path, other centres of society – our emotions, for example, as they find expression through our artists; and our wills, as evidenced in part by a rise in crime and senseless vandalism – protest. These other centres of ourselves feel that they are being dragged, kicking and screaming, down an ever-darkening tunnel. We need to listen to their protest, for they force us to ask if it is possible to move toward a worldview which, without compromising reason or evidence in the slightest, would allow more room to the sides of ourselves that our current worldview constricts. (ibid: 204)

Robert Forman makes a similar point:

Part of the modern worldview was an arrogant but possibility naïve faith in the power of human reason and the experimental attitude. (But) we are slowly beginning to understand that the rational consciousness ... is an evolutionary cul-de-sac, that our monochrome vision is at the root of many of today's countless social, economic, political and ecological problems. (2004: 127)

Implications of modern science and the return of uncertainty

However, the certainty generated by science was not to continue. Developments in quantum physics in the 1930's challenged and ultimately broke down the mind-body split of Descartes, and Newton's mechanical view of the world. The challenge to previous scientific assumptions was major.

The solid Newtonian atoms were now discovered to be largely empty. Hard matter no longer constituted the fundamental substance of nature. Matter and energy were interchangeableThe uncertainly principle radically undermined and replaced strict Newtonian determinism. Scientific observation and explanation could not proceed without affecting the nature of the object observed. The notion of substance dissolved into probabilities and "tendencies to exist". Non-local connections between particles contradicted mechanistic causality.....The physical world of twentieth century physics resembled, in Sir James Jeans' words, not so much a great machine as a great thought. (Tarnas 1991: 356)

These findings were hugely significant for people who had been concerned about the worldview that had been created by Newtonian science.

To the many who had regarded the scientific universe of mechanistic and materialistic determinism as antithetical to human values, the quantum-relativistic revolution represented an unexpected and welcome broaching of new intellectual possibilities. Matter's former hard substantiality had given way to a reality perhaps more conducive to a spiritual interpretation. Freedom of the human will seemed to be given a new foothold if subatomic particles were indeterminate. The principle of complementarity governing waves and particles suggested its broader application in a complementarity between mutually exclusive ways of knowledge, like religion and science. Human consciousness, or at least human observation and interpretation, seemed to be given a more central role in the larger scheme of things with the new understanding of the subject's influence on the observed object. The deep interconnectedness of phenomena encouraged a new holistic thinking about the world, with many social, moral, and religious implications. Increasing numbers of scientists began to question modern science's pervasive, if often unconscious, assumption that the intellectual effort to reduce all reality to the smallest measurable components of the physical world would eventually reveal that which was most fundamental in the universe. The reductionist programme, dominant since Descartes, now appeared to many to be myopically selective, and likely to miss that which was most significant in the nature of things.

Many felt that the old materialistic world view had been irrevocably challenged, and that the new scientific models of reality offered possible opportunities for a fundamental rapprochement with man's humanistic aspirations. (ibid: 357)

However, not everyone responded to the findings of quantum physics in this way. The mechanistic world view was deeply entrenched; and although modern physics now opened up an experience of the world that made a spiritual interpretation possible (which was not the case within Newtonian physics), most scientists were keen to find an alternative explanation. One factor they had to accept though; that it was not now

possible to say that science generated knowledge that was absolute, and allowed for predictability and control. Rather, it now had to accept that knowledge of material reality at its most essential level was limited and provisional.

This created a real problem; because it meant that in a context where people felt that they could find certainty, there was suddenly a realisation that certainty was not possible. Many in wider society too did not want science to be taken off its pedestal. Smith comments:

The reason we resist science's limitations is not factual but psychological – we don't want to face up to them. For science is what the modern world believes in. Since it has authored our world, to lose faith in it, as to some extent we must if we admit that its competence is limited, is to lose faith in our kind of world. (1989: 86-87)

However, another factor appeared which threatened science's position. There was a growing awareness that not all its practical consequences could be judged as exclusively positive. Environmental damage, the breakdown in the ozone layer, and the disruption of the entire planetary ecosystem were just a few of the issues that emanated from scientific progress. Further, a real crisis was reached when the atomic bomb was produced. Suddenly the implications dawned of having a form of gaining knowledge that could destroy the planet; and that science itself could do nothing to manage what happened to the bomb once it was created. The realisation that science was essentially amoral and the implications of that for the planet and its people were overwhelming. The same science that had dramatically lessened the hazards and burdens of human survival now presented to human survival its gravest menace.

Consequently, thinkers within Western society were forced to re-evaluate its previously wholehearted trust in science.

Science was still valued, in many respects still revered. But it had lost its untainted image as humanity's liberator. It had also lost its long-secure claims to virtually absolute cognitive reliability. With its productions no longer exclusively benign, its reductionist understanding of the natural environment deficient, with its evident susceptibility to political and economic bias, the previously unqualified trustworthiness of scientific knowledge could no longer be affirmed. (Tarnas 1991: 365)

Re-instating the significance of the inner self

Those who enquired most closely into the nature of the world, including the place of human beings within it, found themselves having to re-evaluate what they thought they knew. Recent findings in science had meant there was no guarantee that anything could be known; that no-one had a priori rational access to universal truths. The scientific worldview which many had thought was infallible was now open to fundamental question. It appeared that the consequences of living out this worldview were both creating and aggravating problems for humanity on a global scale. Scientific knowledge was exceptionally successful, but its outcomes showed that operating from a partial view of what was 'real' was actually very dangerous.

However, there were many who welcomed the challenge to materialism with open arms, especially those who feared so much for a culture living with a world view that offered no ultimate meaning, purpose or principles to guide behaviour. Christopher Bache states his position very strongly:

Just when Western culture had convinced itself that the entire universe was a machine, that it moves with a machine's precision and a machine's blindness, the ability to experience the inner life of the universe is being given back to us. Because machines are not conscious, the appearance of consciousness in the universe has been interpreted as a cosmic accident. **The entire human endeavour has been emptied of existential purpose and significance because it has been judged to be a product of blind chance.** When one gains access to the inner experience of the universe, however, one learns that, far from being an accident, our conscious presence here is the result of a supreme and heroic effort. Far from living our lives unnoticed in a distant corner of an insentient universe, we are everywhere surrounded by orders of intelligence beyond reckoning. (2000: 4, emphasis added)

Bache suggests that there have been dire consequences for paying attention to the external world, and as a result neglecting the deeper parts of ourselves. He likens the situation to understanding our cosmos through only observing the daylight world, and ignoring the night sky; in both situations, we have an incomplete understanding of the whole.

Taken as a whole, Western thought has committed itself to a vision of reality that is based almost entirely on the daylight world of ordinary states of consciousness while systematically ignoring the knowledge that can be gained from the night-time sky of non-ordinary states. As the anthropologist Michael Harner puts it, we are "cogni-centric". Trapped within the horizon of the near-at-hand mind, our culture creates myths about the unreliability and irrelevance of non-ordinary states. Meanwhile, our social fragmentation continues to deepen, reflecting in part our inability to answer the most basic existential questions. **As long as we restrict ourselves to knowledge gained in ordinary states, we will not be able to provide satisfactory answers to questions about meaning or value, because neither meaning nor value exist in mere sensation nor in the compounds of sensation.** Similarly, we will not be able to explain where we came from or why our lives have the shape they do as long as we systematically avoid contact with the deeper dimensions of mind that contain the larger patterns that structure our existence.

(ibid: 5, emphasis added)

Bache believes that gaining experience and information from being in altered states of consciousness is crucial to gaining a full understanding of what it means to be human. He himself has experimented with various consciousness changing techniques, including the use of psychedelic drugs over an extended period of time, keeping careful records of his sessions. His book *Dark Night, Early Dawn* is based on these experiences, and includes extensive extracts from his recordings. Occupying the position of Professor of Religious Studies at Youngstown State University for over two decades, whilst engaging in such deep experimentation, places him in a strong position to help fill the substantial gap that exists in terms of gaining knowledge from internal worlds. His book impressively models an integration of the theoretical and the experiential, the academic and the practical, inner and outer, subjective and objective.

Simon Bellow, presenting a Nobel Lecture, looks at what accounts of ourselves are given by psychologists, sociologists, historians, journalists, and writers.

In a kind of contractual daylight, they see (us) in the ways with which we are so desperately familiar. These images of contractual daylight, so boring to us all, originate in the contemporary worldview. We put into our books the consumer, the civil servant, football fan, lover, television viewer. And in the contractual daylight version their life is a kind of death.

There is another life, coming from an insistent sense of what we are, that denies these daylight formulations and the false life – the death in life – they make for us. For it is false, and we know it, and **our secret and incoherent resistance to it cannot stop, for that resistance arises from persistent intuitions.** Perhaps humankind cannot bear too much reality, but neither can it bear too much unreality, too much abuse of truth. (Quoted in Smith 1989: 247-248, emphasis in original)

Moving towards an integration of science and religion

Alan Wallace, when considering the relationship between science and religion states:

While science, pursued within the parameters of scientific materialism, has in some respects aided us in our struggle for existence, it provides human existence with no ultimate meaning. Although many people in the modern world try to imbue their lives with religious values without questioning their often unconscious commitment to scientific materialism, such attempts are undermined from the outset. For one's values are groundless unless they are derived from one's beliefs about the very nature of reality and human existence. Traditional religions have provided generations of humanity with a sense of meaning, but the weakness of scientific materialism stems from the fact that it has no such spiritual power. At the same time, religious doctrines that fly in the face of genuine scientific knowledge are also undermined. Thus a pressing question for our modern world is: does a way exist to integrate the power of religion and of science for the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of humanity? (2000: 185)

I have stated before that for me, both science and religion have something to offer, but both also include elements with which I am not happy. I use the word 'spirituality' as a means of communicating a sense of a non-material dimension, whilst not attaching myself to a particular belief system. Drane conveys a sense of what I mean when he says:

...Spirituality without religion (is) a search for God that begins with personal experience and reaches out from there to look for possible answers, rather than starting with the answers and attempting to bring human experience into line with them. (2005: 23)

However, I would probably change the wording and omit the word 'God', because to reflect Karen Armstrong's view, the use of the word 'God' has no objective or inter-subjectively agreed meaning, but only means something in context, when you know the belief system of the person using it.

Consequently, there is not one unchanging idea contained in the word 'God' but the word contains a whole spectrum of meanings, some of which are contradictory or even mutually exclusive. (1999: 4)

Also, instead of 'reaches out from there', I would probably say 'goes within and without'. Nevertheless, I think the commonality is the need to start with questions, and follow the journey that takes you towards a response; which is what I have done with this enquiry, of course. In this way, no-one is constrained by having to accept pre-determined knowledge; everyone has a choice as to what direction they take.

Wilber believes that an integration of religion and science is not just desirable but essential:

So here is the utterly bizarre structure of today's world: a scientific framework that is global in its reach and omnipresent in its information and communication networks, forms a meaningless skeleton within which hundreds of sub-global, pre-modern religions create value and meaning for billions; and they each – science and religion each – tend to deny significance, even reality, to the other. This is a massive and violent schism and rupture in the internal organs of today's global culture, and this is exactly why many social analysts believe that if some sort of reconciliation between science and religion is not forthcoming, the future of humanity is, at best, precarious. (1998: 4)

During the earlier part of the twentieth century, there had been attempts by scientists who were mystically inclined such as Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Teilhard de Chardin, who wanted to combine the scientific theory of evolution with philosophical and religious intimations of an underlying spiritual reality. The problem at that stage, however, was that the need to provide demonstrable empirical evidence which met strict Newtonian criteria was dominant; major questions about the validity of 'absolute knowledge' had not been widely raised.

Given the nature of the case, there seemed to be no decisive way of verifying such concepts as Bergson's creative 'élan vital' operating in the evolutionary process, Whitehead's evolving God who was interdependent with nature and its processes of becoming, or Teilhard's 'cosmogenesis' in which human and world evolution would be fulfilled in an Omega point of unitive Christ consciousness. Although each of these theories of a spiritually informed evolutionary process gained wide popular response and began to influence later modern thought in often subtle ways, the overt cultural trend, especially in academia, was otherwise. (Tarnas 1991: 383)

However, over the last few decades, there have been a steadily growing number of writers who have been exploring the philosophical, spiritual and social implications of the findings of modern science. An additional factor has added to the range and richness of the material that is coming through. With improved communications, we have increasingly closer connections with eastern cultures; which means that we have ready access to their philosophies and belief systems. Observations started to be made concerning the number of parallels that existed between modern physics and eastern mysticism. Fritjof Capra was an early pioneer in this field. In his book *The Tao of Physics*, he identifies what he considers connects the two. One fundamental similarity is the perception of the ultimate 'unity of all things'.

The most important characteristic of the Eastern worldview – one could almost say the essence of it – is the awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of a basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of the cosmic whole; as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality. The Eastern traditions constantly refer to this ultimate, indivisible reality which manifests itself in all things, and of which all things are parts. It is called *Brahman* in Hinduism, *Dharmakaya* in Buddhism, *Tao* in Taoism. Because it transcends all concepts and categories, Buddhists also call it *Tathata*, or Suchness:

What is meant by the soul as suchness, is the oneness of the totality of all things, the great all-including whole.

In ordinary life, we are not aware of this unity of all things, but divide the world into separate objects and events. This division is, of course, useful and necessary to cope with our everyday environment, but it is not a fundamental feature of reality. It is an abstraction devised by our discriminating and categorising intellect. To believe that our abstract concepts of separate ‘things’ and ‘events’ are realities of nature is an illusion. Hindus and Buddhists tell us that this illusion is based on *avidya*, or ignorance, produced by mind under the spell of *maya*. The principal aim of the Eastern mystical tradition is therefore to readjust the mind by centring and quietening it through meditation. The Sanskrit term for meditation – *Samadhi* – means literally ‘mental equilibrium’. It refers to the balanced and tranquil state of mind in which the basic unit of the universe is experienced:

Entering into the *samadhi* of purity, (one obtains) all penetrating insight that enables one to become conscious of the absolute oneness of the universe.

Capra proceeds to identify what he perceives as the parallel with modern physics:

The basic oneness of the universe is not only the central characteristic of the mystical experience, but is also one of the most important revelations of modern physics. It becomes apparent at the atomic level and manifests itself more and more as one penetrates deeper into matter, down into the realm of subatomic particles. The unity of all things and events will be a recurring theme through our comparison of modern physics and Eastern philosophy. As we study the various models of subatomic physics we shall see that they express again and again, in different ways, the same insight – that the constituents of matter and basic phenomena involving them are all interconnected, interrelated and interdependent; that they cannot be understood as isolated entities, but only as integrated parts of the whole. (1992: 142)

Capra also points out the dynamic nature of this ultimate reality:

This reality is seen as the essence of the universe, underlying and unifying the multitude of things and events we observe ... This ultimate essence, however, cannot be separated from its multiple manifestations. It is central to its very nature to manifest itself in myriad forms which come into being and disintegrate, transforming themselves into one another without end. In its phenomenal aspect, the cosmic One is thus intrinsically dynamic, and the apprehension of its dynamic nature is basic to all schools of Eastern mysticism. Thus D.T. Suzuki writes about the Kegon school of Mahayana Buddhism,

“The central idea of Keron is to grasp the universe dynamically whose characteristic is always to move onward, to be forever in the mood of moving, which is life”. (Suzuki 1968: 53)

This emphasis on movement, flow and change is not only characteristic of the Eastern mystical traditions, but has been an essential aspect of the world view of mystics throughout the ages. (Capra 1992: 209)

The more one studies the religious and philosophical texts of the Hindus, Buddhists and Taoists, the more it becomes apparent that in all of them the world is conceived in terms of movement, flow and change. This dynamic quality of Eastern philosophy seems to be one of its most important features. The Eastern mystics see the universe as an inseparable web, whose interconnections are dynamic and not static. The cosmic web is alive; it moves, grows and changes continually. Modern physics, too, has come to conceive of the universe as such a web of relations, and like Eastern mysticism, has recognised that this web is intrinsically dynamic. The dynamic aspect of matter arises in quantum theory as a consequence of the wave-nature of subatomic particles, and is even more essential in relativity theory, where the unification of space and time implies that the being of matter cannot be separated from its activity. The properties of subatomic particles can therefore only be understood in a dynamic context; in terms of movement, interaction and transformation. (ibid: 213)

The quality of dynamic interconnectedness is one that consistently appears both in modern science, and in mystical traditions both east and west. This for me is external confirmation of what I have found from my own experience. Many others discover this from their subjective explorations. I have already spoken of Chris Bache, who proposes that transpersonal experiences show that beneath the levels of consciousness where our minds appear to be separate and distinct are depths where they begin to interpenetrate. This leads to the concept of a ‘group mind’; and leads to a range of questions about the extent to which it is possible for the collective to participate in the life of the individual, and the individual in the life of the collective.

Stan Grof, who for over 40 years has also researched into the learning to be gained from non-ordinary states of consciousness through use of psychedelic drugs, and through ‘holotropic breathing’ states:

The experiences and observations from this research have revealed important aspects and dimension of reality that are usually hidden from our everyday awareness.

Throughout centuries, these experiences and the realms of existence they disclose have been described in the context of spiritual philosophies and mystical traditions ... The findings of my research and contemporary consciousness research in general essentially confirm and support the position of these ancient teachings. They are thus in radical conflict with the most fundamental assumptions of materialistic science concerning consciousness, human nature, and the nature of reality. They clearly indicate that consciousness is not a product of the brain, but a primary principle of existence, and that it plays a critical role in the creation of the phenomenal world.

This research also radically changes our conception of the human psyche. It shows that, in its furthest reaches, the psyche of each of us is essentially commensurate with all of existence and ultimately identical with the cosmic creative principle itself. This conclusion, while seriously challenging the worldview of modern technological societies, is in far-reaching agreement with the image of reality found in the great spiritual and mystical traditions of the world. (1998: 3)

John Heron and Peter Reason have, individually and in partnership, written and practised extensively in relation to co-operative inquiry, a systematic and rigorous method of carrying out experiential spiritual inquiry. Heron, in *Sacred Science* (1998) includes many reports of the research carried out through different inquiries into the spiritual and the subtle, and more recently has published *Participatory Spirituality* (2006), which he subtitles *A Farewell to Authoritarian Religion*.

All of these represent significant work by extremely intelligent individuals having high status and credibility as academics and practitioners, which provide us with a wide range of methods for exploring ‘what it means to be human’. In the process, the response to questions of purpose and meaning remains open; unlike scientism, the worldviews supporting these developing and imaginative ‘ways of knowing’ do not derive from the idea of a mechanical, value-free universe.

In locating my own enquiry within this wider context, I am aware that my ‘way of knowing’, which I detail in the next chapter, is one that I have developed for myself over time, and which draws on techniques derived mainly from my reading and understanding of both depth psychology and meditation. The important aspect for me is that the method, although it should be able to be described in a form that can be tested out and evaluated independently, works for me. In other words, I have means of accessing knowledge about the world through my own efforts, rather than being dependent on the efforts of others. For many years, because of the dominance of religion and then science, we have been dependent on ‘experts’ for telling us the ‘truth’ about life. This leaves the individual rather powerless, and in the position of following others, rather than developing a leadership role for themselves in their own lives. For me, taking control of, being the author of my own life, has always been important. Consequently, I hesitate when I read Paul Davies, who on the one hand seems to have come to similar conclusions about the inadequacies of classical science; but on the other, appears reluctant to take the control away from the scientists.

Most scientists who work on fundamental problems are deeply awed by the subtlety and beauty of nature. But not all of them arrive at the same interpretation of nature. While some are inspired to believe that there must be a meaning behind existence, others regard the universe as utterly pointless.

Science itself cannot reveal whether there is meaning to life and the universe, but scientific paradigms can exercise a strong influence on prevailing thought. In this book I have sketched the story of a new emerging paradigm that promises to radically transform the way we think about the universe and our place within it. I am convinced that the new paradigm paints a much more optimistic picture for those who seek a meaning to existence. Doubtless there will still be pessimists who will find nothing new in the new developments to

alter their belief in the pointlessness of the universe, but they must at least acknowledge that the new way of thinking about the world is more cheerful.

..The emerging paradigm, by contrast, recognises that the collective and holistic properties of physical systems can display new and unforeseen modes of behaviour that are not captured by the Newtonian and thermodynamic approaches. There arises the possibility of *self-organisation*, in which systems suddenly and spontaneously leap into more elaborate forms. These forms are characterised by greater complexity, by co-operative behaviour and global coherence, by the appearance of spatial patterns and temporal rhythms, and by the general unpredictability of their final forms.

.....The universe is revealed in a new, more inspiring light, unfolding from its primitive beginnings and progressing step by step to ever more elaborate and complex states. (1987: 197-198)

At the end of this chapter, Davies concludes:

I should like to finish by returning to the point made at the beginning of this chapter. If one accepts predisposition in nature, what does that have to say about meaning and purpose in the universe?

...In this book I have taken the position that the universe can be understood by the application of scientific method. While emphasising the shortcomings of a purely reductionist view of nature, I intended that the gaps left by the inadequacies of reductionist thinking should be filled by additional scientific theories that concern the collective and organisational properties of complex systems, and not by appeal to mystical or transcendent principles. No doubt this will disappoint those who take comfort in the failings of science and use any scientific dissent as an opportunity to bolster their own anti-scientific beliefs.

(For me there is) powerful evidence that there is ‘something going on’ behind it all. The impression of design is overwhelming. Science may explain all the processes whereby the universe evolves in its own destiny, but that still leaves room for there to be meaning behind existence. (ibid: 203)

The disappointment for me in this conclusion is not, as Davies suggests, that it does not bolster anti-scientific beliefs; but that in Davies’ recognition that there may be meaning behind existence, he does not appear to see the possibilities of applying scientific method in ‘testing out’ some of the ideas around mystical or transcendent principles. However, that would, of course, require him to make a commitment to a practice that would enable him to test these out; which would mean him fully immersing himself into a form of subjective first person research, rather than maintaining some level of distance and ‘objectivity’ in his role as a scientist. He would need to become a participant rather than an observer.

Wallace takes a different perspective:

The current scientific view of the world is fundamentally flawed, for it has failed to take into account the role and significance of consciousness in nature. The reason for that is that science has not developed effective methods for exploring consciousness first hand; and the reason for that is that scientific inquiry has been constrained by the metaphysical principles of scientific materialism. This dogma allows science to explore only those facts of reality

that conform to its creed; and the experienced mind is simply left out. From a scientific perspective, religious views of the world are fundamentally flawed, for they are not evidently based on a precise, critical exploration of the natural world. The reason for that is that the world's religions have for the most part turned their backs on whatever contemplative methods they may have had for exploring reality, and the reason for that is that they have been constrained by unsceptical adherence to authority and tradition. (2000: 187)

Wallace is convinced that science and religion have to find a way of working together if we are to truly discover what it means to be human; but that forms of fundamentalism which are currently evident in both science and religion, where there is no interest or concern for external challenges to their underlying assumptions, are making that problematic. However:

Science and religion have both proven they are here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. They may coexist in mutual ignorance of each other's insights and power; each one may try to suppress or eliminate the other; or they may finally learn that their worlds inevitably intersect, and that such areas of common ground need not be seen as a threat but may be seen as an opportunity for greater understanding. The point at which science and religion must overlap is the human mind itself; yet the origins, nature and final destiny of the mind remain hidden from public knowledge. The empirical study of the mind, unconstrained by the dogmatic principles of scientific materialism and all other religious creeds, awaits us. We are faced with the challenge of restoring our own subjectivity to the natural world, acknowledging its meaningful role in nature. The methods of both science and religion provide us with indispensable tools for such research; and as Wiliam James suggests, we may find that at this point of intersection between the worlds of science and of religion, higher energies filter in. (ibid: 188)

It has been a central aspect of my experience that when living in a state of consciousness that accepts as valid my intimations of spirituality, and which integrates a regular spiritual practice into my life, 'higher energies filter in'.

I explore this in more depth in the next chapter.

Chapter 18

A Continually Evolving 'Way of Knowing'

Having identified the historical and cultural context within which my own search for meaning and purpose has been located, I return now to my personal response to these core life questions. What was the context in which I was currently searching? And could I identify a 'way of knowing' that addressed the difficulties I had encountered in the traditional though conflicting ways of knowing promoted by classical science, and traditional institutionalised religion?

As I reviewed the ways of knowing I had explored and developed over the years, I realised that there were two main elements that differentiated them from the ways of knowing promoted by either science or religion.

The first was that, from the outset of my enquiry in my late teens, I valued my own inner experience. I felt, intuitively, that there was a source of knowledge, of wisdom, to be accessed within myself; and that in my search for knowledge and understanding, I needed to learn how to better access that inner source. In other words, my search gave priority to an inner developmental journey, one objective of which was to find a way of knowing that allowed my inner and outer worlds to be in alignment; to feel as though they were integrated within what I experienced as 'my life', rather than experience a separation between internal and external.

Within my experience, neither classical science nor doctrinal religion saw this as important. Science, with its assumption that matter is primary, and that any experience of an 'inner world' emerges from that primary material condition, gives no value to inner exploration or development. Doctrinal religion, based on a dualist view of 'God' and 'man' sees the purpose of being human as getting to know and following the will of God, who exists external to self. In both contexts the concept of 'law' is important. In science, there are laws in-built to the initial condition of the universe, which when discovered will lead to full knowledge of everything. In traditional religion, the laws have been constituted by God, and to live a good life, need to be learned and followed. In each situation, the 'laws' exist outside of the human being; and the challenge for humanity is to learn and follow these laws. In each situation, the primary goal of the individual is to apply their internal consciousness to external matters.

The second main difference is that, in seeking a way of knowing, I was very much in tune with William James' idea of 'radical empiricism', where experience came first rather than sense perception alone.

The essential problem for James was that there cannot be a science of any kind without some consciousness to name and interpret it. Objective realities always exist not as independent entities, but as a function of something else. (Taylor 1994: 353)

Empiricism is a way of knowing the world, that deals with the whole of experience, whether generated from within the person or outside. James' idea of 'radical' empiricism is to say that there should be nothing included which is not directly experienced; nor anything excluded which is directly experienced. Thus, everything within the whole sphere of human experience is potentially open to investigation; and different forms of verification need to be developed other than those used for the study of experiences which are a consequence only of sensory stimulation.

Neither science nor religion accept these principles. In science, only that which can be perceived by the five senses is 'real'; and in religion, other aspects of experience may be real, but may fall into categories seen to be sinful, evil, and to be avoided. However, as I identified in the previous chapter, both religion and science have proven to be inadequate as means of gaining knowledge about what it means to be human. My personal journey to find a 'way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning' has coincided with a wider search for more effective ways of knowing. Can I connect my search with that wider one?

Certainly, in the time that I have been involved in my personal search, there has been an expansion in exploration of different ways of knowing. Most of these emerge out of an awareness of the limitations of either science or religion or both. Many derive from a transpersonal perspective, from a recognition that there may be a reality that exists beyond the individual. Braud and Anderson (1998) have edited a book *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honouring Human Experience*, which "introduces transpersonal research methods to the study of the transformative or spiritual dimension of human experience" (p. ix). They present a critical analysis of conventional scientific methodology:

During the past three decades, we have become increasingly aware of the limitations of (the) assumptions and practices (of conventional approaches to research). They have been scrutinised, questioned, and criticized by theorists and practitioners within the human sciences (Polkinthorne 1983), the human services (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong 1990), education (Borg & Gal 1989), health and nursing research (Parse 1996), naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba 1985), feminist research (Nielsen 1990), and those who have been exploring the philosophical foundations of science itself (Harman 1991; Harman & DeQuincy 1994; Skolimowski 1994). The gist of these critiques is that although such assumptions and practices have been useful in certain areas of science for certain purposes, they are incomplete, contain unnecessary biases, are unsatisfactory for addressing complex human actions and experiences, and are inadequate even within the natural sciences themselves. More important, such assumptions and practices yield a picture of the world, and of human nature and human possibility, that is narrow, constrained, fragmented, disenchanted, and deprived of meaning and value. Such a view is more consistent with feelings of emptiness, isolation and alienation than with feelings of richness, interconnection, creativity, freedom, and optimism.

To counter this prevailing conception of science and of research, a number of contemporary thinkers have offered complementary assumptions and practices to correct previous imbalances and provide a more complete view of science and research that can more adequately apprehend the complexity, breadth, and depth of our world and of humanity (1998: 6).

They include chapters on a wide range of expanded approaches to research based on methods of inquiry that take seriously the transformative and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

Similarly Hart, Nelson and Puhakka (2000) as editors of *Transpersonal Knowing: Exploring the Horizon of Consciousness*, have identified that we are in times of transition in culture and consciousness. Their aim also is to explore methods of research that challenge conventional boundaries, and allow enquiry into spiritual experience.

For (many) theorists the monolithic rationality of modern science is breaking down, and there is a growing recognition of alternative modes of human knowing.we are witnessing a genuine opening in the horizons of knowing (2000:2)

Frankly, we do not know (in conventional terms) what this knowing actually is, or who knows and who does not know about it.....External, consensually validated standards may offer some guidelines and criteria, but not the knowing itself. For its revelation, we have nothing else to fall back on but the interior view of this knowing. A dialogue among those who access the interior view is essential for the ongoing revisioning of the external standards that the changing manifestations of knowing call for. Such a dialogue can also facilitate access to, and encourage people to trust and give voice to, their own knowing. (ibid: 4, emphasis added).

The interpretive perspectives in which the authors embed their knowing are rather divergent. However, we believe that the lack of uniformity is not simply a matter of the newness of the territory being explored but is intrinsic to the territory itself. Even so, certain basic themes seem to emerge such as authenticity – that this is one's own knowing; immediacy - there is little or no conceptual mediation; connectedness – the boundaries that separate and create the sense of an isolated self seem to dissolve; and transformative capacity – the knower is changed by the knowing and at the same time, openness to change in one's sense of identity opens one to the knowing (ibid: 5).

Certainly, the themes of authenticity, immediacy, connectedness and transformative capacity are integral to my experience as I develop and refine my way of knowing. It seems that those of us engaged in a 'spiritual enquiry', although the methods we use may vary, may find that there are similar qualities and characteristics we experience and can relate to. This needs to be explored in more depth, as individuals embark on their own unique methods of exploration.

Cheryl Hunt, in her article *A Step Too Far? Mythopoesis, Spirituality and Professional Reflective Practice* (2006) covers a number of issues which are relevant at this stage of my exploration. She is considering whether the notion of spirituality has a place within adult education, and quotes Wellington and Austin (1996:311) as follows:

Artefacts (reflective journals, stories of experience, etc) reflecting the transpersonal orientation are introspective and often highly personal. They contemplate questions such as: “how can I integrate my personal/spiritual growth with my vocation?”In this perspective, knowledge is subjective and internal. The validity of research findings relies on resonance with experience. (Hunt, 2006: 8)

Although my exploration did not take place within an Adult Education context, clearly the process of journaling which reflected a transpersonal orientation has been central to my enquiry. The experience of integration has also been a motivating factor for me; so again I could connect with Wellington and Austin’s analysis of a transpersonal approach to reflective practice, in which they see the notion of ‘integration’ as important:

...whereby the links between an individual’s ‘inner life’, including their spirituality, and the enactment of her/his working life are made explicit
(ibid)

Hunt was responsible for convening an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded seminar series entitled “Researching Spirituality as a Dimension of Lifelong Learning”. As a participant in this project, which included attending a number of the seminars, I personally witnessed the response to the meetings that were held. Hunt’s starting point was a clarification of her use of the word ‘spirituality’, which she outlined in the introductory paragraph of her ESRC proposal:

Spirituality is a highly contested concept but we start from the view that: ‘Human beings are essentially spiritual creatures because we are driven by a need to ask “fundamental” or “ultimate” questions ...to find meaning and value in what we do and experience’ (Zohar and Marshall, 2000:4). We also associate spirituality with the capacity to be fully alive and connected to every aspect of existence, including inter-personal relationships, psychological processes and the global environment. Some people seek guidance and resolution in such matters using religious teachings and traditions (Fowler, 1981); others within a humanistic framework that is often shaped by principles of social justice (e.g. Van Ness [1996] refers to ‘secular’, and Berry [1998] to ‘public’ [action-oriented] spirituality). Some may reject the language of spirituality altogether but espouse what might nevertheless be called ‘spiritual values’ in their lives and work through their commitment to others. (ibid: 9)

In her article, Hunt includes a number of quotations from participants, some of which are included here, as they reflect strongly the desire to connect inner and outer, and to both acknowledge and access a deeper spiritual dimension to life.

I left feeling very excited that I’d found a way to unite all parts of myself and my work. I discovered that the connection was ‘me’!
(Feedback: University teaching fellow, February 2005)

Suddenly all the bits of my life are together in one meeting.
(Comment in plenary session, February 2006)

We need more spaces like this where people can be open and honest, touch deeper levels.

(Comment in plenary session, April, 2005)

It has been very energising – most research and professional development is not about that deeper sense-making process.

(Comment in plenary session, November 2005)

As Hunt says:

Such comments give a clear sense of the fragmentation that many people feel in their lives, and of a yearning to bring ‘all the bits’ together and/or to access some deeper meaning: in other words, to seek integration.

(2006: 10)

Towards the end of her article, Hunt states:

Evidence from the seminars suggests that professionals have a real need for spaces in which they feel free to share and reflect with others not only on the how and why of practice situations – but on the myths, narratives, life experiences and ultimate questions that are integral to the ‘intangible fabric’ of being human as well as a professional.

(ibid:11)

It was my need for such spaces, but the fact that they were not available, which set me off on my individualised (and generally lonely) journey of discovery concerning issues that were integral to the ‘intangible fabric of being human as well as a professional’, when aged only eighteen. It feels tragic to me to be made aware, some thirty seven years later, that there is an immense thirst for such spaces; but there still do not seem to be many if any available. Hunt states that she is putting together a proposal for research funding to enable her and others:

..to explore, within a range of professional environments, whether/what kinds of spaces already exist, or might be created/developed for this purpose.

(ibid)

My personal view would be that this is a long overdue area for exploration. If I had had such a space to share my questions and enquiries at an early stage, and was able to engage with others having similar concerns, my life would have unfolded very differently. As it is, I have had to ‘feel my way’ to find ways of knowing that provide me with a basis to gain the kind of information and experience that I was seeking.

When I reflect on the ways of knowing that I have developed over the years, I would suggest that there are three separate but inter-related strands:

1. ‘Being true to self’ – listening to my inner world – finding better ways of doing that – and seeing where it take me.
2. My spiritual practice – which has developed over time, as I have recognised the powerful nature of the relationship between that, and what happens on a day-by-day basis.
3. Telling my story – as a means of reflecting on my own learning, and understanding it from a different perspective – and also as a way of sharing my experience and learning with others.

As my enquiry has progressed, my way of knowing that enables me to find meaning has continued to evolve. It is rooted in a daily practice, which acknowledges my need to give as much attention to the reality that can only be accessed from within myself, as I do to the external reality in which I live out my life. Very early in my enquiry, through my exploration of depth psychology, and then later, through my study of Buddhism and meditation, I experientially discovered the importance of accessing the deeper reaches of myself.

My daily practice still remains similar to the one I developed at an early stage of my enquiry, though perhaps I am now more conscious and structured in what I do.

Withdrawal

- It is important to me that I have the time and space to withdraw into my internal being each day. Ideally, this will be for some time after waking; and again later on in the evening, perhaps immediately prior to sleeping.
- At these times, I seek to be in silence, and to bracket out the external world. I settle into a deeply meditative state; the aim is to completely still my mind.
- I just allow myself to stay in that place of being still. I do not force anything. If thoughts drift through, I don't actively push them away – I just allow them to float through. I don't give them energy, do not dwell on them.
- I continue to be still – and to listen. I make no effort. As far as I am able, I just am. I stay there, in the peace and the quiet.
- On some occasions, if time allows, or if it seems important to do so, I pick up a notebook and pen, and write. I do not write with conscious intent; I just allow the pen to flow.
- By this time, I feel very connected to an invisible realm, charged with warmth and energy. I feel comfortable, relaxed, at home.
- But I am also silently asking what is required of me; how should I be in the world?
- I continue to listen – and possibly write – for as long as I need or have time for.

Return

- It feels tempting to stay in this place; in my place of inner quiet, I feel safe, comfortable, secure. I can understand what Martin means when he said: *Everyone who makes the experiment is likely to feel at times, perhaps repeatedly, the subtle fascination of the inner world, drawing him to it* (1955/1999:208).
- However, this is the nature of life; and my challenge is, as far as possible, to recognise and realise my reason for being alive.
- I come back into the external world; and as far as possible stay with the same state of mind.

- When I return to the world, I live with the intention of creating connection amongst people, and minimising destructive and negative behaviours that lead to others feeling isolated and lonely.
- After my ‘withdrawal’, I will generally return to the world with a renewed sense of the infinite; I seek to hold that sense in every present moment, and to live in the world from that place.

The role of the observer

- At the same time as living this way, and immersing myself fully in the living, I am also aware that there is a part of me which takes on the role of the detached observing self: ‘What is going on here, are you acting appropriately, are you putting your values into practice, is there something you should be doing differently?’
- This observer (O) tends to be rather critical, and will soon let me know if I am not doing the best that I could in some way. O’s standards are high, and will not let me off easily. (However, it communicates with care and compassion, not negatively or destructively; this is the part that represents the scientific rigour, I think; that will challenge me in relation to whether I am deluding myself; how can I know whether I am or not, etc.)
- It is O who gives me the feedback as to the nature of the relationship between what I hear from my internal voice, and the outcomes of what happens as I live in the world. O is also very pragmatic and down to earth. It is no good having wonderful internal experiences of peace and quiet if it does not translate into action that makes a difference in the world. By ‘make a difference’ I mean action which (in however small a way) contributes to loving relationships and productive work; and which seeks to find constructive resolutions to situations which cause feelings of isolation, pain, and suffering.

This daily practice lies at the core of my way of knowing. Its main purpose is to enable me to inhabit the reality that can only be accessed from within, as much as I inhabit the physical three dimensional universe. It allows me to continually and directly re-experience my sense that the cosmos is more than just matter; there is a dynamic, loving energy with limitless creative possibilities. I learn what this means for me as I live out my daily life through a process of being ‘true to self’; that is, by ensuring that my actions authentically reflect my deep intuitive sense of what I should be doing. At times when I doubt, and become anxious or fearful for any reason, I act with cosmic trust; with a trust that the cosmos is inherently loving, engaged in a purposeful and meaningful process; and that if I stay in tune with its essence, my life will also be loving, purposeful and meaningful. I have enough evidence from previous experience to justify my keeping faith in the cosmos through difficult times. I seek to stay connected to my deep inner source, and to the wider cosmos through my regular, spiritual practice.

Cosmology, ontology, epistemology and methodology

This way of knowing works for me. It has emerged out of my search for a way of knowing that integrates apparent opposites such as inner/outer, spiritual/physical, rational/intuitive, subjective/objective, and intellectual/experiential. I have been developing, practising and refining this way of knowing throughout the duration of my enquiry, responding to and learning from the challenges I have experienced along the way.

My way of knowing includes cosmological, ontological, epistemological and methodological contributions. The key words that connect and have relevance in all of these are: participation, interconnectedness, love, dynamic energy, and creativity.

Cosmology

A cosmology that perceives the universe as an ultimate whole, which includes spirit and matter, in which everything is interconnected; where change in one part affects the whole; where there is overall purpose and meaning to the whole, initiated by a loving, dynamic and creative energy, which is reflected in the life of each individual; but it is only through the life of each individual, in collaboration and communion with others, and in participation with the spirit, that the meaning and purpose of the whole can be realised. In my cosmology, I see myself and others not “as independent subjects and objects isolated by gaps” but rather “interdependent, dynamic relational flow-forms, pooled together in space.” (Rayner 2007)

At times of doubt, because I cannot prove this cosmology, but because it makes most sense most of the time, I move forward with faith, and ‘live with cosmic trust’, with the trust that the cosmos is ultimately reliable, loving, and will support me on my journey.

Ontology

An ontology which sees each living individual, and all forms of relationship, as being the ‘self-disclosure of spirit’, and which includes the loving, dynamic energy with limitless creative possibilities of my cosmology. When I write about a loving dynamic energy in my ontology, I bear in mind Vasilyuk’s (1991) point about energy and values having been poorly worked out in psychology:

Conceptions involving energy are very current in psychology, but they have been very poorly worked out from the methodological standpoint. It is not clear to what extent these conceptions are merely models of our understanding and to what extent they can be given ontological status. Equally problematic are the conceptual links between energy and motivation, energy and meaning, energy and value, although it is obvious that in fact there are certain links: we know how ‘energetically’ a person can act when positively motivated, we know that the meaningfulness of a project lends additional strength to the people engaged in it, but we have very little idea of how to link up into one whole the physiological theory of activation, the psychology of motivation, and the ideas of energy which have been elaborated mainly in the field of physics.
(Vasilyuk 1991: 63-64)

In my ontology I experience a flow of energy that I feel as life-affirming. I associate this energy with Bataille's expression of eroticism where he explains that human beings can distinguish the energy in the sexuality of eroticism from 'assenting to life up to the point of death' (1987:11). It is this assenting to life that I feel in the flow of a loving, dynamic energy.

My ontology is also distinguished by my search for meaning and purpose which includes this flow of energy. My ontology can be connected to Paul Tillich's 'courage to be' where he says:

It is the state of being grasped by the power of being which transcends everything that is and in which everything that is participates. He who is grasped by this power is able to affirm himself because he knows that he is affirmed by the power of being-itself. In this point mystical experience and personal encounter are identical. In both of them faith is the basis of the courage to be." (Tillich 1973: 168)

Tillich is writing from a theistic perspective which I do not. Yet his language for expressing the feeling of 'being affirmed by the power of being-itself' is one I choose to use in communicating my meanings of the experience of a flow of loving, dynamic energy.

Epistemology

An epistemology which is based on each person accessing the spiritual source of wisdom that lies within them, and finding their own purpose for being in the world, which is discovered through identifying what feels meaningful for them. In my epistemology, as my theory of knowing, I work with the idea that an epistemology includes the standards of judgment for evaluating the validity of a claim to knowledge. An original contribution in my way of knowing, in this thesis, is the living standard of spiritual resilience emerging from a continuing and sustaining experience of a loving, dynamic energy with limitless creative possibilities. The originality of this standard of judgement can be appreciated with the help of Murray's (2007) understanding of epistemological nomadism, where he points to the tension of exposing and opening up new ideas set against the practical need to hold them steady and stabilise the meanings for the purpose of communication:

One of the consequences of my epistemological nomadism for producing a clearly communicable text that I have come to understand through my inquiry is that I have this creative, excessive, or 'leaky' (Lather 1993) tendency where my imagination is still working out the possibilities that have moved further on than I have been able to communicate in my text. This produces a 'gap' because I have not stabilized either my meanings or writings before I have moved on again in the direction of new, insightful 'oases'.

The flow of my liquid imagination requires a solution, or moment of stability, perhaps a stabilising process, in which the runaway liquidity of my meanings are staunched just long enough for me to translocate them in communicable ways into my text. This tension of exposing and opening up new ideas set against the practical need to hold them steady and stabilise them so that I can communicate their meanings has remained with me throughout my research inquiry as a journey of liquid discovery, and ever-present in my writing-up

process. I have not resolved this issue. The tension remains: I imagine it will require a very conscious effort of self-discipline on my part whenever I write. (Murray 2007: 208)

In relation to Rayner's (2004) idea of inclusionality, the original standard of judgment in my epistemology is 'relationally dynamic' and 'receptively responsive'. It is relationally dynamic in carrying a loving dynamic energy with creativity. It is 'receptively responsive' in that my standard of judgment of spiritual resilience expresses my spiritual resilience as receptive to feelings of despair and helplessness and responding creatively with hope to challenging situations.

Methodology

I use a methodology that is an integration of narrative inquiry and action research. The Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology (Clandinin 2007) highlights the upsurge of interest in narrative inquiry as a legitimate approach to research. In her contribution to this Handbook on 'My Story Is My Living Educational Theory, McNiff (2007) explains how a narrative inquiry can include an action research approach to the generation of a living educational theory. As I explain my learning in expressing and developing my spiritual resilience gained through experience of a loving and dynamic energy with limitless creative possibilities, this explanation constitutes my living theory. The explanation emerges through my narrative as I engage with my concerns, imagine possible ways forward, choose one possibility in an action plan, act and gather data to enable me to make a judgment on the influence of my actions, evaluate my actions, modify my concerns, plans and actions in the light of my evaluations and produce a narrative of my learning that includes an explanation of my educational influences in my own learning. Through this methodology of narrative inquiry and action research I clarify the meanings of my ontological values and form these values into my communicable epistemology standards of judgment (Whitehead 2006).

Having told my story of the journey I have taken in responding to these issues, I can now stand back and reflect on the learning gained, taking on more the perspective of the observer than the participant. In the process, there are three main conclusions that I have come to:

1. In searching for a way of knowing that helps me make sense of my life, I cannot go very far without accepting, at least as a working hypothesis, that there is a spiritual dimension to life. Indeed, from the beginning of this enquiry, I have sensed something 'other', and have acted 'as if' there is a spiritual dimension which exists beyond my material being. I have developed a relationship with this deeper source within myself, and have actively sought its guidance in making choices in the world. The experiences I have had have often been more powerful and profound than I would rationally expect if the ultimate source of them all was the rather squishy wrinkled mass that constitutes my brain! It makes much more sense to me to see my brain as a transmitter rather than as an initiating creator.
2. Further, without a spiritual dimension, it is not possible to go very far with questions of meaning and purpose. Many having a materialist world view might claim they gain meaning from, for example, their family and other close relationships. This may be sufficient until something happens that threatens the health and well being

of these significant people. In those circumstances, there is little a materialist perspective has to offer; this is an arbitrary event. If our existence is a consequence of pure chance, or a random accumulation of particles which just happened to create consciousness in the process, then there is by definition no meaning beyond that which we construct for ourselves within our own brain; there is no larger context within which these events can be seen to be, or even have the possibility of being, meaningful.

3. Taking this further, without accepting a spiritual dimension, there is little meaningful support to be offered to anyone experiencing any form of pain and suffering. Even for those who believe this universe is part of a wider reality which includes the presence of a 'divine' being, many forms of suffering- especially those experienced by people who seem to have done nothing to deserve it - are hard to explain. If there is any meaning to be found in suffering, there is generally a need to dig deep into inner resources. For materialists, suffering is in the main another by-product of chance events, events which fall well for some, badly for others – but with it not being possible to provide any meaningful or logical explanation as to why.

I believe that the disenchantment of the modern universe is the direct result of a simplistic epistemology and moral posture spectacularly inadequate to the depths, complexity, and grandeur of the cosmos. To assume a priori that the entire universe is ultimately a soulless void within which our multidimensional consciousness is an anomalous accident, and that purpose, meaning, conscious intelligence, moral aspiration, and spiritual depth are solely attributes of the human being, reflects a long-invisible inflation on the part of the modern self. (Tarnas 2007: 40)

This is not to suggest that I am claiming to have proven there is a spiritual dimension to life; of course I have not. The materialist view may be correct: our lives and our pain and suffering may indeed be random and essentially meaningless events, which at the point of death disappear without trace. However, if I had accepted that as my main hypothesis, this particular enquiry would have ended as soon as it began. The answer to my questions concerning meaning and purpose would have been: there is no meaning and purpose in relation to life as a whole, and hence there cannot be to my life in relation to that wider context. I may then, of course, have modified my enquiry to consider whether I could find a way of living that I could experience as meaningful and purposeful, despite its ultimate arbitrariness; but that would have made it a very different piece of research; and my life would have unfolded in a very different way. This supports, of course, the finding from quantum physics that the questions we ask, what we choose to perceive, shapes the nature of reality that unfolds.

On the other hand, I have discovered nothing during my research to disprove the existence of a wider spiritual reality (of some sort). Indeed, I hope this thesis will demonstrate that there is perhaps more evidence to support the presence of a spiritual reality than to negate it; and will provide pointers to help people explore this in more depth for themselves.

In my earlier writing, I found it difficult to express how I came eventually to understand myself and the world I lived in through my deep inner work. Since then, I have returned to Jorge Ferrer's book *Revisioning Transpersonal Experience: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*, which I referred to in the final sections of Part I, and

which since then has helped me further develop a language that reflects my experience and learning over time.

Ferrer challenges the subjective / objective and ontological / epistemological divides that dominate our intellectual understanding of the world. He contends that spirituality has traditionally been seen to be restricted to an individual's internal subjective experience; and seeks to recognise the Spirit not only in interior depths, but also in the rich texture of our relationships, and the very substance of the world. He states:

Most universalist approaches to spirituality are reductionist, in that they tend to privilege certain human potentials and spiritual paths over others; they are not generous enough to the infinite creative potential of Spirit. Many seekers struggle to make their lives conform to a pre-given spiritual ideal or pathway that their minds have adopted from either a tradition, teacher or universalist scheme. Sometimes people have a pre-determined idea of what they are seeking to achieve, thereby unconsciously sabotaging the natural process of their own unique spiritual unfolding and constraining the creative potential of the spiritual power that can manifest through them. Although fruits can be obtained from a commitment to almost any spiritual practice, the final outcome of these endeavours is often a spiritual life that is devitalised, stagnated, dissociated, or conflicted. (2002: xix)

Ferrer is very clear that the source of our existence is a mystery, and is likely to remain so. Richard Tarnas, in writing a foreword to the book, supports Ferrer's view that there is a "spiritual truth" that has the "Mystery of Being" as its ground. He sees this spiritual truth as being "participatory, enactive and pluralistic" in nature; and the ground of being as "liberated from all intellectual schemas that claim to theorise the whole of reality". In talking about Ferrer's approach, Tarnas responds with pleasure to "see a powerful mind employed fully in service of opening to the Mystery of existence, rather than attempting to contain, categorise, and rank, in service of the needs of an overarching system". As identified earlier in this thesis, Ferrer does not approach his idea of transpersonal realities by having

accurately described by intellectually confident assessments and rankings of the multiplicity of humanity's spiritual paths and perspectives measured against a single pre-given universal Reality;

but rather approaching by

a much more subtly intelligent and more heartfelt dialogical engagement with the Mystery that is source of all – hence, by a dialogical engagement with each other in respectful openness to the diversity of wisdom's self-disclosures, and a dialogical engagement with one's interior being and with the cosmos itself, in reverent openness to the irreducible depths of its mystery, intelligence and power. Such knowledge is an act of the heart as much as it is an act of the mind, the two inextricably united. (ibid: xiv)

It is the phrase "heartful dialogical engagement with the Mystery that is source of all" which I feel best captures my experience and practice. Ferrer develops his notion of the idea of Mystery:

I believe that we are in direct contact with an always dynamic and indeterminate Mystery through our most vital energy. When the various levels of the person are cleared out from interferences (e.g. energy blockages, bodily embedded shame, splits in the heart, pride of the mind, and struggles at all levels), this energy naturally flows and gestates within us, undergoing a process of transformation through our bodies and hearts, ultimately illuminating the mind with a knowing that is both grounded in and coherent with the Mystery. Because of the dynamic nature of the Mystery, as well as our historically and culturally situated condition, this knowing is never final, but always in constant evolution. (ibid: 169)

Ferrer also talks about individuals who feel that spirituality

is not so much about having special private experiences, but about cultivating emancipatory understandings that transform not only their inner being, but also their relationships and the world.....Neither the indeterminate nature of Spirit nor the dynamic quality of spiritual unfolding can be fully captured by any conceptual framework. As the history of ideas shows, claims of ultimacy have been invariably proven to be both naïve and deceptive. What is more, claims about final truths are hostile to the nature of being and knowing espoused by the participatory vision. If, rather than pre-given or objective, being and knowing are enacted, dynamic, and participatory, then it should be obvious that claims about final, immutable, or universal truths are both misleading and distorting. (ibid: 187)

Ferrer expresses very strongly the belief that a dualistic perspective, whether that be in ontology or epistemology, distances us from the reality that is the source of our being. If there is a perception of a pre-given reality, the truth of which we need to discover, then there is an immediate boundary set between ourselves and 'other' which keeps us separate and alienated.

In a participatory epistemology free from Cartesian-Kantian molds, the so-called mediating principles (languages, symbols, etc) are no longer imprisoning, contaminating, or alienating barriers that prevent us from a direct, intimate contact with the world. On the contrary, once we accept that there is not a pre-given reality to be mediated, these factors are revealed as vehicles through which reality or being self-manifests in the locus of the human. Like Gadamer's (1990) revision of the nature of historical prejudices, that is, **mediation is transformed from being an obstacle into the very means that enable us to directly participate in the self-disclosure of the world.** (ibid: 172-173, emphasis added)

Ferrer, then, sees life as being a fundamentally creative process, not potentially predictable in nature, because it is concerned with the self-disclosure of spirit; and we as embodied beings participate in that self-disclosure. He quotes Panniker (1996) as follows:

There is no need of epistemological mediation because ontologically everything is ultimate mediation, or rather **communion**. Everything is, because it mediates. Everything is in relation because everything is relation. (ibid: 173)

In other words, a participatory epistemology transforms the notion of mediation into the idea of intimate communion with the cosmos.

Ferrer repeats a thought experiment created by Tarnas (1998):

Imagine you are the universe, a deep, beautiful, ensouled universe, and you are being courted by a suitor. Would you open your deepest secrets to the suitor – that is, to the methodology, the epistemology – who would approach you as though you were unconscious, utterly lacking in intelligence or purpose, and inferior in being to him; who related to you as though you were ultimately there for his exploitation, development, and self-enhancement; and his motivation for knowing you is driven essentially by a desire for prediction and control for his own self-betterment? Or would you open your deepest secrets to that suitor – that epistemology, that methodology – who viewed you as being at least as intelligent and powerful and full of mystery as he is, and who sought to know you by uniting with you to create something new? (ibid: 173-173)

Ferrer continues by saying:

The moral of this thought experiment, of course, is that for its deeper secrets to be revealed, the world needs less suspicion and domination, and more love and cosmic trust. We need to cultivate, as Panikkar (1998) puts it, a “cosmic confidence in reality” whose ultimate ground “lies in the almost universal conviction that reality is ordered – in other words, is good, beautiful, and true. It is a divine Reality”. When we look deeply into the nature of such trust, Panikkar adds, we realise that this “cosmic confidence is not trust in the world, confidence in the cosmos. It is the confidence of the cosmos itself, of which we form a part inasmuch as we simply areThe confidence itself is a cosmic fact of which we are more or less aware, and which we presuppose all the time”. (ibid: 174)

Ending these extended extracts from Ferrer’s book, I select one final section which connects directly with my own enquiry. In considering what gain there might be to living with ‘more love and cosmic trust’, Ferrer suggests:

I would like to venture here, the most valuable gifts we can receive are probably answers to what Needleman (1982) calls the Great Questions of Life, namely Who am I? Why are we here? What’s the meaning of life? Is there life after death? What can we know? Is there a God? How should we live? And so forth. As Needleman stresses, the response to these questions cannot be given to us in propositional or objectivist fashion, but gracefully offered as states of being in which these mysteries turn into Mysteries, ceasing to be the cause of sorrow and anxiety, and becoming the source of boundless wonder, joy, and celebration. (ibid: 174)

In this final quotation, Ferrer is proposing that there are ways of responding to the kind of questions that were present at the start of my enquiry which are not of a propositional nature, but which emerge from deep experience.

Validity

My way of knowing has included learning and insights gained from my study of depth and transpersonal psychology, religion and spirituality, and science. Depth psychology introduced me to the notion that aspects of our consciousness are not immediately accessible to us in our normal waking state, and provided me with techniques to access what existed in deeper dimensions. Transpersonal psychology provided a context to explore the view that our being is not bounded by our skins. Religion and spirituality allowed me to explore different approaches to the view that we are spiritual as well as material beings; and that perhaps the spiritual dimension plays a more significant and primary role than a materialist would suggest. Finally, science provided a methodology that encouraged me to establish hypotheses, test them out in practice, and produce evidence to either negate or confirm the hypothesis; in other words, to present findings of my enquiry in a way that allows others to decide whether there is sufficient evidence to validate the hypothesis; or at the very least, support a case for further investigation.

It is this final point that I consider further now. What evidence do I have to support the view that the learning I have gained, and my 'way of knowing' has anything to offer anyone other than myself?

I believe that it has; and my argument to support that point of view would go as follows:

As I write in 2007, few would deny that we live in times of great uncertainty and confusion. Terrorist action and environmental pollution / exploitation both present major threats at a global level. Despite the apparent 'progress' that has been made in the western world, there is still widespread violence, exploitation, poverty and levels of addiction in every nation. We do not have a 'way of knowing' which understands why this is so, or knows what to do about it.

Religious groups will claim that it is a consequence of not adhering to 'God's will'; but there are many versions of what form God takes, and what His will is, with no evidence to support one story over another. Science provides knowledge supported by evidence, and hence contends it offers the only valid means of finding truth; but in the process it ignores any aspect of our experience that is not amenable to its stringent rules of validation. Further, it has provided the means and knowledge to engage in even more effective destructive behaviour, and does not exist to help us find a means of human flourishing.

Consequently, we have no universally acceptable way of knowing that allows us to constructively deal with the uncertainty and confusion we experience as a human race, and guides us in a direction that enables us to identify and fulfil a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives. In the absence of such a way of knowing I believe, at this stage at least, each person needs to find their own.

This is a major tenet of my thesis. My contention is that there is no one method of gaining knowledge that will account for all aspects of what it means to be human. The fact that each person's life is a combination of internal and external experience, with the internal part being unique to that person, makes it impossible to obtain knowledge gained by experimentation set up in identical situations, with all variables accounted for. Human experience is much more unique; hence the method of knowing needs to recognise that uniqueness.

Having told the story of what this has meant for me, what response can I make to questions concerning the validity of my findings? Smith (1989) suggests that the motives we have influence the outcomes that emerge (again reminding us that in quantum physics, the questions and issues which the observer/researcher holds in mind influences the nature of reality that is created). Through operating with a desire to control the universe, we have tended to look at the world as responsive to analysis and manipulation; which leads to separation, fragmentation, and alienation. However, if we start out with a wish to participate in the whole in partnership with others, then possibilities expand, and there is a greater chance of personal fulfilment. It seems, Smith proposes, that taking an inclusive approach holds more potential for benefiting us as human beings than does seeking increasingly greater control. However, we then face a challenge with epistemology:

Refusing to accept as truth's final arbiter the controlled experiment (or even objectivity, the consensus requirements of which push it relentlessly, as we have seen, toward sense-verificational empiricism), this alternate epistemology is faced with the problem of distinguishing between veridical discernments and ones that are deceptive. (1989: 211).

The question is, what kind of evidence is acceptable? In *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, Ken Wilber has explored the issue of validity claims in both scientific and spiritual enquiry:

The *demand for evidence* – or validity claims – which has always anchored genuine and progressive science, simply means that one's own ego cannot impose on the universe a view of reality that finds no support from the universe itself. The validity claims and evidence are the ways in which we attune ourselves to the Kosmos. The validity claims force us to confront reality; they curb our egoic fantasies and self-centred ways; they demand evidence from the rest of the Kosmos; they force us outside of ourselves! There are checks and balances in the Kosmic Constitution. (1998: 32-33)

Wilber proposes that there are three essential aspects of scientific inquiry which lead to valid knowledge:

1. A practice which is in the form "If you want to know this, do this".
 2. A direct apprehension of the immediate experience of whatever domain results from the practice.
 3. Communal confirmation (or rejection) – that is checking the results with others who have also adequately completed the practice and the apprehension.
- (ibid: 156)

Following the philosophical approach of William James, science needs to expand from a narrow empiricism (sensory experience only) to a broader empiricism (which allows all direct experience to be used as relevant information). Religion also must be more flexible; it needs to allow its truth claims to be open to direct verification – or rejection – as a result of experiential evidence.

Wilber states clearly his view that in a scientific approach to spiritual experience (where he perceives the relevant practice to be meditation or contemplation) it is necessary to experience the practice in order to gain information about it. If a person does not engage in the practice, then they cannot see or experience the relevant data. In this situation, it is not possible to either validate or invalidate any conclusions gained by those who do engage in the practice. (1998:155-158)

Modern empirical science tends to reject the interior world because it appears opaque to the scientific method. But, Wilber claims, the interiors themselves are accessible, because the interiors of 'I' and 'We' can be experientially explored, investigated, reported, confirmed or rejected.

He contends that there are already spiritual disciplines which follow the three stands of valid knowledge accumulation – these include the contemplative and meditative traditions, which have been carefully collecting interior spiritual data for at least three thousand years, and traditions which show a surprising agreement as to the basic structure of the spiritual stages of human development.

It is therefore routine, in virtually all of today's attempts to integrate science and spirituality, to claim that the rise of modern science contributed directly to, or even caused, the "disenchantment of the world". The common and widespread view is that the modern West with its modern science, more or less in one major step, massively rejected soul and Spirit, God and Goddess, sacred nature and immortal soul – and left us with the modern wasteland. (ibid:188)

Of those who do take up the injunction of contemplation and meditation, the strong sense is that in the fourth state of consciousness, qualities and insights, most often characterised as 'spiritual' come increasingly to the fore. An expanded sense of self, consciousness, compassion, love, care, responsibility, and concern, tend gradually but insistently to enter awareness. These claims can and have been subjected to empirical and phenomenological tests. (ibid: 199)

David Bohm in a lecture delivered in 1998, spoke of the necessity to integrate inner and outer forms of research:

Sir George Trevelyan has said that the West had emphasised the outward view of nature, the East the inward view of the mind. Both are probably one sided, and both have demonstrated a certain kind of inadequacy. The West's inadequacy is now becoming painfully obvious as it threatens to destroy the world. The inadequacy of the East is more subtle in the sense that things became stagnant there and when they were exposed to the West, they did not go on with their own culture but adopted the West's which is a rather mechanical thing to do, I think. They adopted some of the worst features, so that what seems to be required now is to make a new step in which we actually see the new meaning of both sides together.

Either you must go into some retreat and look at things inwardly, or you try to engage with what is actually going on in society. Either way you will find a hopeless contradiction, so it is necessary to bring these two together; the outward and the inward must be compatible, they must agree. There is pressure towards that, because everybody generally throughout our society has accepted the mechanistic outward view so that the inward has become more and more mechanical. And you can see the effects by watching television programmes. Its effect must be to make people more and more mechanical. It seems therefore that the world view, the view you take of science and the view of the world as a whole, the world of matter, the world of physical reality and so on is important for the other side. We really have to bring it all together and therefore work on both sides seems to be necessary, which is really the point I wanted to make. (Bohm 1983: 71-72)

In the final chapter of this thesis, I return to the issue of ‘looking at things inwardly’ through meditation and contemplation, the significance of these in the development of our ‘ways of knowing’, and the nature of their relationship with conventional scientific methodologies.

In the next chapter, I return to the experiences of the Transformative Living Inquiry Group, the significance to group members of the relationship between ‘I’ and ‘we’, and the challenges involved in communicating what has been gained from participating in the group inquiry.

Chapter 19

The Group Continues to Enquire

In this chapter, I make a second attempt to understand and make sense of the experience and learning gained through participating with others in a group, which started out as an enquiry into 'transformative living'. As I returned to make this attempt, other group members joined with me to help me in my endeavour.

However, despite the commitment and passion shared by six of us, we still had difficulty articulating what we had gained through being in the group. As I write the chapter, I am still struggling to comprehend what has undoubtedly been an invaluable experience for all of us, but about which none of us have discovered the means to properly communicate.

I have not hidden the extent of my / our struggle; to do so I think would have led me to return to the 'artificiality' that I was criticised for in my earlier attempt. There is a considerable part of what I have written that could be seen as speculative. However, given one of the main concepts I am exploring is an 'evolution of consciousness', and our potential ability as human beings to push back the frontiers of what that means, I believe there is a role within the context of this doctorate for such speculation. In seeking a 'way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning' I have been finding myself inevitably drawn to the boundaries of experience that border on that which is mysterious; and it seems that in the life of this group, my co-inquirers are present with me on that edge also.

Although the writing in the chapter is mine, the voices of my 'companions' are interlaced throughout. Appendices include edited transcripts of conversations, and a written contribution from each group member. In addition, there is a DVD which includes a 40 minutes extract from our dialogue. It is my intention to demonstrate that in seeking a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning, what 'we' and 'I' do are interconnected; the individual and collective journeys are inextricably woven together.

Introduction

I have been writing this chapter for a long time – probably for nearly as long as I have been involved in the group that we have variously called the Transformative Living Inquiry Group, the Co-operative Inquiry Group, or just 'The Inquiry Group'! Our first meeting took place in April 2000, to consider the question: *"What would engaging in a more transformative way of living actually mean in practice?"* In 2004, I brought together all the notes I had taken in the three years we had been meeting, and attempted

to write a comprehensive account of our experience and learning. This account is included in Appendix 1; and I explain in Chapter 12 why I decided not to include it in the main body of the thesis. In summary, I (and my readers) were dissatisfied with what turned out to be a rather artificially contrived third-person report and evaluation, which in large part did not communicate the quality of the experience, nor what ‘transformative outcomes’ there had been for those involved.

Since 2004, I regularly reflected on how I was going to articulate the group experience and learning. Several of us continued to meet twice a year. This was acknowledged to be a social gathering, so there was not the discipline and structure of the earlier sessions. Ben and Emma were not able to be there, as they were either working in Wales, or at the time of the later meetings, were visiting Emma’s parents in Australia. Bryce had other commitments which made the long journey difficult for him. This meant that the group now consisted of seven women.

The weekends were enjoyable and rewarding. We continued to meet at Charney Manor, and brought food on a ‘bring and share’ basis. Although the days were not formally structured, the weekend did develop a rhythm of its own. There would be the coming together on a Friday evening, a meal, wine, and a general catching up on news. After an extended breakfast on the Saturday, we would move into the lounge area, and have a group meditation. Each person would then in turn talk in some depth about what they had been doing since the group had last met, and share any particular events, learning and challenges they had experienced during that time. This would be followed by responses from the other group members. The process as a whole was characterised by the depth of listening and attention that had for so long been an integral quality of these group meetings.

However, there must have been some questioning about the basis on which we were coming together; because during a weekend in September 2007, there was towards the end the question raised as to whether there was a purpose in our continuing to meet. There were strong friendships between group members; but these could be maintained in different ways, and did not necessitate everyone coming to Charney twice a year. Most had to travel considerable distances, and Clare had given up her car. Annette had been unable to make the previous two meetings. I know I felt that probably the end of the group life had come; I was sorry about it in a way – but I knew that it would not be the end of the relationship with different individuals, which was the important factor for me.

Then something very odd happened. Group members had as usual been sharing what had been going on for them. I had not yet had my turn; and when thinking about what I was going to say, I thought my main contribution would be around challenging developments at work. Then Christina chose to talk about her experience of not being well, having to stay in bed for some time, and how this had led to her engaging in an in-depth reflective process which she saw as taking her onto another stage of her ‘spiritual journey’. Her sharing was so profound, it made me realise that actually my input would sound rather superficial in comparison. Not that this mattered in itself; but we were a group who traditionally shared on a deep level, and I wondered what it was that was preventing me from doing that. As I awaited my turn, I thought that if I were to talk about something that was really impacting on me, it would be about the challenge I was having in articulating the learning from the TLI group inquiry. As it had formally

ended in 2004, however, I did not see the group as it was at present being particularly interested in working with me to achieve this outcome.

Then, not yet having made up my mind what to say, Gilly looked at me, and asked me a direct question about my thesis. I realised at that stage, I needed to share with the others what I was finding difficult. At that point, it was as though there were a tangible shift in the atmosphere in the room. I immediately became the focus of attention of everyone present; and there was a level of unanimity that the group should now concentrate on helping me complete my thesis. It was agreed that we meet again in November, so that I could have the group contribution to add to my thesis, if I decided it was helpful and relevant.

Between the two meetings, there was some email exchange; the will to help me was great. However, there was an ongoing difficulty which no-one, least of all me, knew how to get over. That was, individually we were all sure that the group had been of immense value to us; but none of us could articulate in detail what that value was, or how it had been created. We reached a limit in terms of what we could achieve through email, and agreed to wait till we met. We also agreed that we would video at least part of our meeting time, to see if we could capture something additional to what the written word had to offer.

Communicating our experience through verbal and visual representation

The group met at Charney Manor during the last weekend in November. I had previously asked everyone to think about what value they felt the TLI group had been to them. I knew everyone wanted to make a valid contribution; but I also knew that everyone shared my problem – how to understand and articulate what that was.

On the Saturday morning, we met after breakfast in the lounge at Charney Manor. We had decided to run the video recorder from the beginning, and sat in a position that would allow us to see each other, but would also allow the camera to capture the whole group. There was no plan to structure the session in any particular way. I have included an edited transcription of what was said (Appendix 2); and a DVD which covers 40 minutes during the latter part of Saturday afternoon.

Group members have also written to me and each other at various times. In Appendix 3, I include a contribution from each of them.

As I continue, I engage with each of these as I reflect on how they connect with the questions I am exploring in my thesis.

Engaging in dialogue

Early on in our dialogue, we looked at the challenges faced when we were claiming to ‘know’. I discussed in Chapter 18 how it was possible to validate subjective experiences. Very often in the group, we would share in depth, and feel there were many aspects of our inner experiences that we shared, to the extent that we felt we could reliably say we ‘knew’ that we shared a similar experience. During the weekend, Jenna

gave an example of one of these occasions, when we were working together to see what we meant by a ‘spiritual experience’. She says:

I remember sitting with you when we were teasing out exactly what a spiritual experience felt like and getting to a place where we had shared enough for me to understand that what you felt in that space felt similar to what I felt like in that space – and that felt very profound for me. That was one thing for me that showed there was an inter-subjective comparison that validated that experience. We can read what others write, and think it’s the same; but unless we have the opportunity to tease out with someone else, it is not easy to compare.

At one stage, we raised the question of what we can know. Clare stated that she had always known that there was ‘something other’, whereas I have doubted it. When I responded by saying that I **felt** there was, but could not **know** it, there was an immediate discussion about the difference between ‘feeling’ and ‘knowing’. I cited my reluctance to use the word ‘know’, due to the conviction statements of (for example) suicide bombers who were so sure they ‘knew’ that when they went to heaven they would be rewarded with 21 virgins awaiting them, that they were prepared to blow themselves up. How could I differentiate between their version of ‘knowing’ and mine? The group agreed this was a fundamental question. Christina responded by acknowledging the impossibility of ultimate knowing:

Meister Eckhart stated that the ultimate knowledge is unknowable. Part of what it means to be human is to touch the mystery – it’s knowing what we don’t know – the mystery of faith – how we are meant to live our lives, with this mystery, this knowledge.

The paradox of knowing / not knowing had again made itself evident; and certainly relevant to me as I asked the question “Can I find a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning?”

It has become evident through the writing of this thesis that I have come to accept a boundary of knowing, on the other side of which is mystery. However, my provisional hypothesis that we are involved in an ‘evolution of consciousness’ suggests that we are able to shift that boundary, and perhaps at least learn something more about the nature of the mystery, albeit indirectly rather than directly.

During this weekend there occurred one of the most profound experiences I have had with the group, which I felt contributed to this ‘shifting of boundaries’. We had been talking a considerable amount about the connectedness that had been created within the group, whilst recognising that this had not come without a struggle. We acknowledged our difference and diversity, but celebrating our often felt experience of ‘at-one-ness’.

Alan Rayner expresses a view of reality called ‘inclusionality’ which seems to have resonance with our experience.

Through inclusionality we can soften the hard-line definition of our selves and others as independent subjects and objects isolated by gaps, into interdependent, pooled together in space. We melt from icy solidity into a pool of warmth. (Rayner 2007)

It is perhaps a sense of this 'softening of hard-line definition of our selves' that allows Clare to say about our feeling of togetherness:

There is a communion, an accompanying, a being with

We consider what it is that enables us to feel such connectivity; and whether the life of the group can be considered separately to the life of the individual. At this stage, we have moved into 'Bohm' dialogue – based on a model of dialogue initiated by David Bohm, where there is a silence- a space to reflect between each verbal contribution - based on the principle that at least as much goes on in the silence as in the speaking, which encourages a deeper level of communication.

A new kind of mind begins to come into being which is based on the development of a common meaning that is constantly transforming in the process of the dialogue.Going further along these lines would open up the possibility of transforming not only the relationship between people, but even more, the very nature of the consciousness in which these relationships arise. (Bohm 1985:175)

It seems to me that dialogue of this nature can only promote the depth of connection that we already experience. I am interested to see what will emerge when the group uses this method.

After an initial silence, Edwina mentions starlings – how they come together and work as a whole, in a way and for reasons that no-one understands.

They work as a group, as though the group has a memory. Is what we experience something to do with that?

Something holds them in a pattern. They can't be thinking individually – something holds them – and then lets them go, and they lead their own lives. Then at some later stage they come together as a group again – but they are not held by anything tangible. They are held as a unit – but they are not held by anything tangible. As part of the oneness, as part of the 'everything'.

For me, it is what makes them do it? There must be some connection between them – some energy – that enables them to work as a unit. There is something in them that connects with each other.

Edwina in dialogue with others, interspersed by silent reflections, struggles to understand what it is that holds the starlings as a group, and whether, in understanding that better, we might better understand what holds us together as a group; what (for example) brought us together at the last meeting, when most of us were thinking we would separate?

The DVD clip records how we move on with this dialogue. The silences between our speaking feel profound. I personally am beginning to experience a heightened sensation that I cannot quite explain – an intensity that reflects what I experience when I too observe miracles in nature, such as the togetherness of starlings in communal flight.

Christina is evidently feeling similar:

I'm remembering a time when I was in myself feeling very intense. All sensory input was quite amplified. I was observing in North Africa this

immense flock of starlings. Just listening – the intensity of the vibration – they were all making some sound as they are flying; the intensity was almost unbearable – it was beautiful but unbearable, it was so intense. When they go back to their individual lives, there is not that level of intensity. It is being in that cosmic dance that creates that vibrational level, that is so much more intense than when they are doing their individual things. I am thinking back to the last time we met; there was something about the intensity of the connection, that somehow transcended, I think it's probably true to say, any experience we have had of the group so far, even when we were meeting regularly as a CI group. Something to do with the unity – at a vibrational level when we were absolutely at one.

Through the next few moments, I can feel the intensity building in me. I decide to speak about it.

Christina was feeling the intensity of the starlings; and I was feeling here that there was something else intense going on. Does anyone else feel this?

I feel as though I am living at the edge of something. When I feel at that kind of edge, I feel a kind of intensity, which I am feeling now. I am seeing whether I am feeling this on my own, or whether it is a shared feeling.

Jenna says quietly:

There is something powerful going on.

And Edwina adds:

I didn't want to say anything that would change that intensity. I felt it would be very easy to say something that could lead us off.

There then follows a 7 minute silence that feels enormously powerful. I am tingling; feeling a sense of wonder at the shared experience of something numinous, beyond description.

When, as I am writing this section, I receive a group email written by Alan Rayner, I can connect to this statement:

Through the natural inclusion of spatial receptivity, inclusionality, (there is restored) the dynamic continuity implicit in the fluid geometry of a profound NATURAL COMMUNION, where the contemplation of a starry night, a tempestuous sea, a swirling river and a vibrant forest all **bring a sense of awe and belonging that is both exciting and comforting.** (email 3 February 2008, emphasis added)

In my case the 'natural communion' is present in the silence; and although I have felt this quality of feeling when in nature, it is currently my feeling of re-connection, through the group silence, with my sense of a loving dynamic energy with limitless creative possibilities that 'brings the sense of awe and belonging that is both exciting and comforting'. I am quite sure that it is my encounter with this quality of experience that provides me with what I term 'spiritual resilience'; and it is sharing these experiences with others in the group, reflecting on what connects us as individuals and keeps starlings together in flight, that makes me wonder whether spiritual resilience is a way of perceiving an intangible connecting force that is present in various ways throughout the universe.

The silence eventually comes to an end; and Christina talks about often feeling something of this intensity, a feeling of one-ness, when we meet together.

I realise – and share – something that feels very significant.

I thought that level of intensity was hugely profound – it became a meditation. We just moved into this – it was very profound – I am still feeling on this edge of an experience. I kind of felt – does this tell us something about life? We have been through struggles as a group. There are times when we have felt we are not moving – there have been many struggles over the years.I suppose it was resonating with me that this is what life is about – that I will get to that place that will make the struggle worth it. At times when I am really struggling with life, I have sometimes wondered if it is worth it. I spoke earlier of the choices we have; and I have at times thought of ‘choosing’ whether to have a breakdown. It is that faith that keeps me going – it reaches a resolution of something.

In other words, my experience of spiritual resilience has emerged from my sense that, no matter how tough the challenges, there is a warm, loving energy that I can access; and that if I can sustain my connection with that energy, I will be able to respond positively and creatively to any situation I am in. I wonder if Frankl in the concentration camp, or the young girl he met who gained such strength from her feelings of connection with the blossom on the tree, would relate to what I was feeling. I believe they would; because my continuing experience is leading me to believe that the energy we are connecting with is as real (though as mysterious) as the energy that keeps the starlings together in flight.

Is there any scientific interpretation of such a quality? Perhaps not exactly; but for me, David Bohm, the physicist, is getting close when he identifies his notion of implicate and explicate order; and like Alan Rayner, does not see space as ‘empty’.

What we call empty space contains an immense background of energy, and matter as we know it is a small, ‘quantized’ wavelike excitation on top of this background, rather like a tiny ripple on a vast sea. ...This vast sea of energy may play a key part in the understanding of the cosmos as a whole.

In this connection it may be said that space, which has so much energy, is full rather than empty. The two opposing notions of space as empty and space as full have indeed continually alternated with each other in the development of philosophical and physical ideas. ...It is being suggested here, then, that what we perceive through the senses as empty space is actually the plenum, which is the ground for the existence of everything, including ourselves. The things that appear to our senses are derivative forms and their true meaning can be seen only when we consider the plenum, in which they are generated and sustained, and into which they must ultimately vanish. (Bohm 1980: 191-192)

Bohm calls the sea of energy that underlies the physical universe the “implicate order”, which then unfolds into the visible ‘explicate’ world that we see around us.

In this picture, reality unfolds from this invisible sea and then folds back up again. Bohm began to speculate that these ideas might serve as a metaphor for understanding other levels of experience, including thought and consciousness

itself. He had begun to identify the implicate order in the external world, but now he was positing that there was a direct correlation to it in thought that could also emerge or be evoked within us. (Isaacs 1999: 39)

Certainly, in terms of our group experience, it seems that there is an energetic ‘implicate order’ that discloses itself to us; may this be another way of perceiving the ‘self-disclosure of spirit?’ ‘Spirit’ is possibly that which is ‘implicate’; matter is that which is ‘explicate’; and the evolution of consciousness may be the process by which we more consciously learn how to make the implicate explicate. As I said earlier, speculative; but I believe the learning from our profound group experience confirms that possibility.

Alan Rayner, in the development of his theory of inclusionality, speaks a different language, but I feel is groping towards a similar kind of understanding:

When space is included in our perceptions of boundaries, it becomes inseparable from the energy that makes us alive. ...We neither see the world and Universe about us as an incoherent assemblage of independent objects or closed systems surrounded by emptiness, nor do we lose ourselves in a featureless oceanic infinitude. Instead we feel ourselves, with others, as inhabited places, distinct but not discrete expressions, ever-transforming through the dynamic, reciprocally breathing relationship of inner with outer through intermediary space. Aware now of our place as local expressions of everywhere, we are not alone – we belong with, but decidedly not to one another, together, coherent thought the connectivity of our common space, unique in our individually situated identities. (Rayner 2007)

And so the learning from the group is mainly about the importance of experience; of learning to connect with others and with nature in ways that defy rational articulation. I want to end this chapter with a contribution from each of my co-enquirers, each of which connects with a critical aspect of my enquiry (taken from personal communication from them to either myself or the whole group - see appendix 3).

Gilly is the creative artistic member of the group, and always seeks to remind us that propositional knowing is not all that is:

Have we not all clearly said that outcomes may not be known or seen in any visible form?

Being the most right-brained member, I sometimes yearned for more creative expression of the sublime Divine, music, art, poetry, song, dance!

Edwina, reflecting on the idea of an ‘evolution of consciousness’, sent me a quotation from Andrew Cohen, spiritual teacher, and pioneer of the idea of ‘evolutionary enlightenment’ (see <http://www.andrewcohen.org/>)

It's not the evolution of you, it's the evolution of we - the evolution of the consciousness that's being shared in the collective or intersubjective ‘we’ space between individuals.

The intersubjective ‘we’ space between inspired individuals becomes a creative vortex in which something is being born every moment out of the spiritual, moral, intellectual, philosophical friction. There is a constant vibration that is

inherently creative in the we-space between committed human beings who share a passion to create the future in the present moment. Together, you become a vortex through which evolution occurs.

Jenna relates to me when I say how I have been struggling to find the words to convey the group learning and experience:

There is a point where words no longer suffice to describe – it's like the words on the paper being used to describe the paper, or the paperiness of the paper, whereas the issue is what it is like to experience BEING the paper.

Clare responds to my request concerning what the group has meant:

You asked for something about what the group has meant to each of us. THIS is what it means to me: that we are each other's teachers, and each other's students, that I can grope after deep and tender feelings and communicate them to you all in the spirit of offering and in the knowledge of being received.

Finally, Christina states what she feels the value of the group has been for her:

I had become aware that something greater than ourselves was emerging – that the power of the group psyche had transcended that of the individual mind, enabling me to gain levels of insight I could not have attained alone. And I realised that my life was indeed transforming. Inner changes manifest outwardly – surely an affirmation of the authenticity of what we were researching?

The life journey itself is a journey of transformation – variously described as a journey back to the Source, towards the Unity (wholeness, perfection) from which we emerged; What the C.I. experience offered was the inner and the outer space to explore experientially and in depth the mystery and meaning of transformative living.

The learning from the inquiry group had undoubtedly been very rich, and had both confirmed and expanded my sense that my 'way of knowing' integrated inner and outer, matter and psyche, science and spiritual.

However, one of the outcomes of this process for me was understanding why it was such a struggle we all had to clearly formulate the learning and value to be gained from the group experience.

A question I then asked myself was – in what ways am I relating my learning from this enquiry to my external life? In the next chapter, I hope to give one example of how I am doing this when I consider the relevance of leadership within my professional role.

Chapter 20

Transformational Leadership

Professionally, I had moved from being a social worker, to being a social work educator, and finally to setting up my own organisation, where I had more scope and freedom to develop my own path within my working life.

In this chapter, I consider how an aspect of that role - the work I have done on transformational leadership - reflects the principle of integration between theory and action, inner and outer, professional and personal, and intellectual and spiritual; and provides a 'case study' of how I am living out my enquiry in the external world.

Introduction

In 1995, I started Bordesley Institute (for Management and Leadership Development) as an independent education centre. There were two main reasons. Firstly, I had left my role as a lecturer in a College of Further Education, because there was for me too little opportunity for flexibility and creativity, and too much bureaucracy. I flourished within an environment where I had the freedom to negotiate with individuals and organisations as to what their learning needs might be, and how we might best meet them.

After five years as a self-employed trainer and consultant, I decided that I wanted to be able to offer accredited qualifications; hence the setting up of an independent education centre that would allow this to happen.

In my early years as a consultant, I worked mainly in the care sector, as that was my professional background, mainly in management and team development. As time continued, I became progressively involved in both writing and delivering management development programmes for organisations outside of care, both in the private and not-for-profit sectors.

In recent years, I have become particularly engaged with leadership (in contrast to management) as a concept and practice. Firstly, I have realised that I play more of a leadership role at Bordesley – my co-Director, Nicola, takes greater responsibility for maintenance and quality issues, whereas I tend to focus on the future of the organisation, looking at how and where it can develop in the longer term. This has led me to differentiate between management and leadership, and to consider what implications these differences have for the respective roles occupied by myself and Nicola, including what kind of leadership role I play at Bordesley, and how I wish to see that develop.

Secondly, leadership is an area that is attracting growing interest from companies, and consequently we are looking at what development programmes we as an organisation can offer in response to this interest.

Finally, at a personal level, I am fascinated by the role of leadership in wider society; and what implications the findings of my enquiry might have for my developing understanding of the theory and practice of leadership within that context.

It is not my intention to look specifically at leadership theories as part of the thesis. My intention is more to give an example of how my learning from this enquiry is manifesting itself in my professional world; and how I am seeking to find ways to integrate my internal and external worlds.

One continuing challenge on which I have been reflecting is to look at how I can begin to start a dialogue about 'spiritual' dimensions and experiences in life within mainstream organisations. My perception is that the domination of a materialistic and mechanistic worldview is reflected in most organisations, which place great emphasis on systems, procedures and profit margins, but not so much on how to "find meaning and value in what we do and experience." (Zohar and Marshall, 2000:4). During my career, I had thought on many occasions of seeking to work in an organisation that reflected the kind of spiritual and ecological values which I saw to be so important. However, all such organisations 'sat at the margins'; in some way, I wanted to engage with those in the mainstream, even though it made it far difficult for me to have any influence. Also, my experience with the Scientific and Medical Network had told me that there were problems even in organisations which were completely supportive of my world view. In the case of the Network, the proviso to my involvement was implicitly 'as long as you don't place too much pressure on people to look at how to apply the ideas they were interested in to their own day to day living'.

I realised that my difficulty was not with specific individuals, either in marginal or mainstream contexts. Rather, I perceived this as a cultural issue which pervaded the whole of our society; and saw it being a consequence of my hypothesis that humanity is involved in an 'evolution of consciousness' in which we have considerable ground still to cover. If I were to play any role at all in that evolutionary process, I wanted in some way to stay connected to mainstream organisations, as it is these which would eventually need to experience some kind of transformative change if wider society as a whole were to shift.

A continuing aspect of this challenge was that, as a small independent centre with considerable overheads, we have to remain commercially viable in order to survive. Consequently, I have to stay connected to what organisations require, if they are to continue to use us. I have, over time, made attempts to represent ourselves externally within a more expanded context. For example, our principles of professional practice include one that states: "We recognise that work has intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions, and ensure that all aspects are given the opportunity for expression". Our brochure indicates that:

We are researching exciting new areas of thinking, and exploring the impact these will make on people and the growth of tomorrow's organisations. Unexpectedly modern science is providing us with many

useful insights. Quantum physics, chaos and complexity theories reveal a world where everything is interconnected. We are at the forefront of this leading edge thinking and are creating major change programmes that will transform both attitudes and behaviour.

We have also developed a Diploma in Transformational Leadership which encourages an exploration of what is meant by the word ‘Transformational’, and that “an assumption underlying the programme is that it’s not possible for a leader to transform an organisation without being involved in some kind of transformational process him / herself”.

However, the reality is that for the most part, people do not respond to these aspects of what we offer, and in the main opt for more ‘regular’ accredited qualifications. AMEC, an international corporate civil engineering company, commissioned several short courses looking at the relevance of modern science for creative thinking. We have run two full programmes offering the Diploma in Transformational Leadership qualification – but as these were attended mainly by people coming from a Christian background, it was not really the target audience I was seeking. Many individuals respond positively to what we represent and what we are seeking to achieve; but this does not translate into funded programmes. The challenge of creating a dialogue concerning issues to do with questioning the mechanistic world view, and introducing concepts such as ‘spirituality’ and ‘transformative practice’ is truly a tough one.

I have recently, however, decided to try another means of achieving that end. As an organisation, we wanted to attract new companies to use us; not an easy process as those who buy our programmes are mainly Midlands based, so we are not well-known elsewhere. However, we had an external advisor suggest to us that (in sales language), ‘email marketing’ might be a good method to try. What we should do is write an article which would be interesting and informative to people, and invite them to a free half-day seminar where they could hear more. The sales aspect of this was, of course, that if people were sufficiently interested and motivated to learn more, they would buy places on our courses for either themselves or others in their organisation.

An issue we are often asked to look at is how managers can ‘manage change’ in their work environments. One of the consequences of increasing globalisation, and the turbulent society we live in, is the extent to which companies are continuously going through major change processes, through for example, expanding what services or products they offer, or acquiring /being acquired by other companies. I decided to see whether people might respond to the idea of ‘transformational leadership’ as a means of helping them choose what action to take in rapidly changing contexts.

I initially wrote an article entitled *Leading Transformational Change*. A summary as it appears at the front of the article, and some sections taken from it are included in the following section. (For the full article, see Appendix 4)

Leading Transformational Change

Summary

Historically, organisations have often been viewed as if they are machines; and managers have operated as though they can control the parts of that machine (the employees) through a bureaucratised system of rewards and punishments. Those advocating transformational leadership have challenged this view. They have claimed that organisations will be more successful if employees' needs are recognised and valued, and they are empowered to play a greater role in decision-making. However, theories of transformational leadership have tended to focus mainly on the external behaviours of leaders and staff.

This article suggests that it is not only relevant for leaders to learn how to behave in the external world, but also to be aware of the significance of what they think and feel. In other words, internal states of minds and reflective processes have a direct influence on external actions. To gain a full understanding of the power and potential of transformational leadership, and to have the capacity to successfully lead transformational change, it is important to take a more holistic view of individual and organisational life, and develop an awareness of the relationship between inner and outer worlds.

The article reflected my understanding that theories of leadership have tended to follow ideas that pervade the cultural mind set; so for example, theories of transactional leadership are based on a mechanistic view of society; theories of transformational leadership recognise that society develops organically.

However, I suggest that most writers on transformational leadership coming from a business perspective tend to focus on external behaviours, and neglect the importance of what is sometimes called the 'inner path of leadership'. I write in the article:

Smith describes it as follows:

We all have unrealised potential within ourselves, which we can use to transform and improve our organisations and our lives. Unfortunately, it often remains unrealised. Most people underestimate themselves, not realising the qualities and potential they possess. Even fewer know how to access these. Inner Leadership will enable you to recognise the deep resources you have and apply them, taking the lead wherever you are in your organisation.

Corporate transformation can only take place where there is individual transformation. As Dr W Edwards Deming said: "Nothing changes without personal transformation." Yet personal transformation has not been within the remit of organisations. People are required to see themselves and their organisations in a wider or different context before change can take place, but scant attention has been given to how to achieve this. When a number of individuals practising inner leadership come together, they can combine in a far more powerful, creative and effective ways than ever before.

Recently, though, there have been a number of researchers who have based their work on an acknowledgement of a deeper dimension to life. I report on the work of Peter Pruzan and Kirste Pruzan Mikkelsen (2005), who have formally interviewed 31 top executives from 15 countries in 6 continents. These people all feel comfortable with the use of the term spiritual, and give their experience of how they feel spirituality and rationality can go hand in hand: a truly holistic approach to leadership and life.

The business leaders interviewed by Pruzan and Mikkelsen suggest that there is much more going on in the lives of many top executives than might be suggested by conventional theories; their contributions do not just focus on their behaviours, but rather give us a greater sense of their felt connection between inner and outer worlds. Throughout all interviews where these influential and successful leaders tell their stories, the importance of integrating inner and outer worlds as the basis for enabling truly transformational leadership is repeatedly emphasised.

Perhaps even more significantly for me on a personal level, however, has been the work of Peter Senge et al. Senge, founding Chairperson of the Society for Organisational Learning, and author of the widely acclaimed book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* has recently co-written a book entitled *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organisations and Society*. The rationale and model they are proposing for accessing ‘inner worlds’ is very close to that which I originally encountered in *An Experiment in Depth*, and which has informed my meditative and journaling practice ever since. I write as follows:

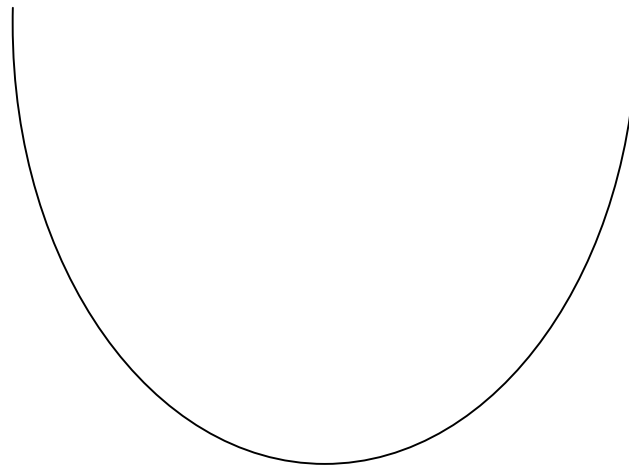
The authors believe that ancient ideas of leadership have been inappropriately neglected. For example, the core of Confucian theory of leadership formation rests on the idea of the ‘cultivation of self’.

If you want to be a leader, you have to be a real human being. You must recognise the true meaning of life before you can become a great leader. You must understand yourself first. (2005: 180)

Senge et.al have a model of practice which they see as supporting the idea of ‘individual cultivation’ – which they call the ‘theory of the U’. The process is simply reflected in the following diagram:

Sensing

Realising



Presencing

Sensing

The first stage, ‘sensing’, is being aware of what is going on around you; observing any changes taking place. This would be a time when practical action is undertaken to assess what was going on for an organisation: for example, undertaking a ‘SWOT’ analysis – that is, identifying the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that need to be taken into consideration when developing a strategic plan. As far as is possible, habitual ways of thinking are suspended, to enable you to gain a more expanded view of the situation you and your organisation is in. Observation of all that is going on is the major element here.

Presencing

The next stage is to ‘retreat and reflect’. This is the phase that is probably most commonly omitted as a conscious process in traditional theories of management and leadership. Many theories will at this point look at decision making techniques. However, Senge et al suggest: “the rational calculus model of decision making and following through pays little attention to the inner state of the decision maker”. They call this process “presencing – seeing from the deepest source and becoming a vehicle for that source.” They develop their explanation of presencing as follows:

When we suspend and redirect our attention, perception starts to arise from within the living process of the whole. When we are presencing, it moves further, to arise from the highest future possibility that connects self and whole. The real challenge in understanding presencing lies not in its abstractness but in the subtlety of the experience.

We chose the term 'presencing' to describe this state because it is about becoming totally present – to the larger space or field around us, to an expanded sense of self, and, ultimately, to what is emerging through us. (ibid: 89)

Realising

In most theories of change or leadership, the leader is seen as separate from what they are seeking to change. They can then feel frustrated, because events don't happen as they plan, others resist the changes, and their attempts to realise their 'vision' can be thwarted. However this theory suggests that the more a person is able to access the deeper parts of their consciousness, the wiser and more effective their action is likely to be. It promotes the ability to 'act in a natural flow'.

It's almost as if I'm watching myself in action. I'm both engaged and simultaneously detached. When that happens, I know there will be magic.

The chronic shortcoming of many planned change efforts is blind adherence to 'the plan'. The magic arises because our awareness is expanded and the source of our intention has shifted. Just as moving down the U requires refraining from imposing pre-established frameworks, moving up from the bottom of the U involves not imposing our will. Operating from this larger intention brings into play forces one could never tap from just trying to impose our will on a situation. (ibid: 91)

So reaching the top of the U involves trusting one's intuitive as well as rational judgement; and the suggestion is that the more time and space given to deep inner reflective processes, the more the action that emerges is likely to be right for both self and the whole.

I am aware that the challenges facing leaders of organisations in these rapidly changing times are major; the organisation I lead is very small, and the challenges are demanding enough. Most contemporary theories of organisational change acknowledge that traditional styles of hierarchical management, with the emphasis placed on maintaining existing systems and procedures, are no longer 'fit for purpose'. A proactive approach to change is required if an organisation is to survive and thrive.

Increasingly, transformational leadership is promoted as the means by which such change can be led and facilitated. However, most of the existing literature focuses on a dualistic model, where the leader behaves in a particular way to gain the desired response and involvement of followers. We need to understand in greater depth the relationship between the mindset of the leader, the actions taken, and the effect on others and the wider organisation.

This, though, is where the cultural mindset impacts greatly on the individual mindsets of leaders. If I use myself as model, I would suggest that without access to some spiritual depth, it is not possible to gain the equanimity and what I term the 'spiritual resilience' to sustain transformational leadership practice in very difficult circumstances. The demands on leaders are so great that many are acknowledging they need to have a deeper understanding of how to respond. I would suggest that in order to lead

transformational change, leaders need to engage in a transformational learning process themselves

How to encourage leaders to consider this, though, was the question I was asking myself. I realised that the article I had written was firstly, too academic, and secondly, introducing too many ideas too quickly to business people, most of whom would not be acquainted with such thinking. Consequently, in collaboration with others from the organisation, I developed a version of the article for 'email marketing', that was generally more readable, and would be more likely to attract people to explore further the concept of 'Transformational Leadership' (see Appendix 5).

At the end of the article, the reader was able to access information about the seminar, which included the following:

Input and discussion will include:

- There is a world of difference between being a Manager and being a Leader: which are you, and which do you want to be?
- Modern Leadership theory talks about transformation – what does this one mean for you?
- How can you access your own experience and wisdom to think imaginatively and inspire others?

The email was sent out to nearly 5,000 Chief Executives and Senior Managers taken from a number of databases, principally those who subscribed to Management Today and the Training Managers Yearbook. As a consequence, over 300 signed up to receive the article, and nearly 100 people expressed an interest in attending a seminar. This may not seem a high proportion – but apparently in marketing terms, having 2% of people respond to any marketing material is good; we had nearly 6% respond to this first attempt of ours.

My aim at the seminars was to take a step further than had been taken in the article. The first half covered relatively conventional leadership theories; the second half I concentrated specifically on the importance of emotional and spiritual intelligence as well as cognitive intelligence as being important elements in influential and transformational leaders. I spent considerable time exploring the concept of what different people understand by 'spiritual', in the main connecting it to 'that which gives people meaning and value in their lives'. I was very careful to separate out 'spiritual' from 'religious', to ensure that people were clear that we were not taking a theistic view of the universe (though not excluding from the dialogue those who did hold theistic beliefs).

At the time of writing, this process is in its early days. However, already I have been encouraged by response (I had reservations as to whether the article would gain any interest at all); and also by the levels of energy and engagement evident at the three seminars that have taken place to date. The issue that has generated the greatest debate has been (perhaps predictably?) that around spiritual intelligence. Some have queried the use of the word 'spiritual', whilst still being interested in the general subject under

discussion; others have embraced it, and stated that they feel there is a lack of opportunity to discuss with others such issues at this level.

There is still a long way to go before similar discussions become the norm on traditional management training courses. I do not know how successful I will be in encouraging people at all levels in organisations to think of themselves as leaders; to explore how such thinking might be useful in helping them work out how they can connect with deeper levels of themselves, and what value this might be for them. For of course, I do not consider this form of thinking and being to be relevant only to Directors and Senior Managers. The only reason I am targeting them at present is because I have learned through all my work on managing change in organisations, that it does not matter how much you enthuse people at different levels of management, if the CEO is not behind the change, it will not happen; and employees end up feeling more frustrated and discontent than they were previously. Consequently, for change at this level, the CEO has to be engaged.

I end this chapter by returning to *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organisations and Society*, to identify other points made there that resonate with my thinking and experience. For example, Senge et al claim that what is emerging is a new synthesis of science, spirituality, and leadership as different facets of a single way of being. They refer to the inventor Buckminster Fuller, who said that we all of us are scientists; in other words, we all have the capacity for primary knowing, for seeing the generative processes of life. Fuller did not follow the social trend of putting science on a pedestal; or of believing that scientists can tell people how things 'really are', with the rest of us becoming passive recipients of their knowledge. Rather, science for him was 'putting the data of your experience in order' - rather, in fact, what I am seeking to do in the writing of this thesis!

Fuller believed the future lay in cultivating the scientist in all of us. He perceived science as an unfinished project, the next stage of which would be about reconnecting and integrating the rigor of scientific method with the richness of direct experience to produce a science that will serve to connect us to one another, ourselves, and the world. (2005: 212)

The view of Senge and his co-researchers was that the universe could only be appreciated 'from the inside' as an emergent living phenomenon, through cultivating the capacity to understand the living world *and* ourselves as an interconnected whole. One way of expressing it was that the journey toward science had to be 'performed with the mind of wisdom'.

I finish with a quotation from Betty Sue Flowers, one of the other researchers, which reflects so closely my own view:

As models of leadership shift from organisational hierarchies with leaders at the top to more distributed, shared networks, a lot changes. For those networks to work with real awareness, many people will need to be deeply committed to cultivating their capacity to serve what's seeking to emerge.

That's why I think that cultivation, 'becoming a real human being', really is the primary leadership issue of our time, but on a scale never required before. It's a very old idea that may actually hold the key to a new age of 'global democracy'. (ibid: 186)

Chapter 20

Closing Reflections

As I come to finally complete this thesis, I take some time to reflect on the intellectual, emotional and spiritual journey I have followed, the learning I have experienced, and the present place to which it has brought me. In many respects, I feel not much has changed. I am still enquiring into issues of meaning and purpose, pain, suffering and violence; I still seek ways of knowing that help me in my search for meaning.

In other respects, though, so much has changed. I am more knowledgeable, more settled and at peace in myself, and feel wiser.

Inherent in this is the paradox I have experienced throughout the process of learning. It is best summed up by something Einstein is reputed to have said: “As the circle of light grows larger, so does the circumference of darkness around it”. One theme that runs throughout my thesis is that, despite our rapid growth in knowledge, our shared human ignorance concerning answers to core life questions, such as whether there is any fundamental meaning and purpose to life, is as vast as ever. Many explanations have been forwarded in the name of science, religion and philosophy, each with their adherents; nevertheless, no-one is any closer to ultimate answers. The basic assumptions of all forms of knowledge are debateable rather than provable.

Linked closely to this, then, is the ultimate mystery we need to accept at the boundaries of our experience. On many occasions, I have felt on my journey that the path I am following is shrouded in mist, that however much I peer I cannot see far ahead, and there is no form of existing knowledge which provides a reliable guide. In facing the unknown, I have felt I needed to search within that unknown for sources of help and guidance, rather than rely solely on what was available to me in an already constructed form.

Seeking guidance from a ‘felt, intuitive’ rather than a ‘seen’ source introduced a major element of unpredictability into my life: the future was far from certain. Heraclitus, the sixth century BCE Greek Philosopher, believing change is an essential element of life, encouraged an open-minded approach to the future: “If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it, since it is trackless and unexplored”. (Wallace 2007b: 49)

A further factor that intensified the feeling of working with the unknown was that the focus of my concern was not one that was seen to be an appropriate subject for research in academic institutions. The starting point of my concern (and to the writing of this thesis) was an awareness of the amount of pain and suffering in the world. It was not that there was no awareness of their existence; extensive evidence is provided on a daily basis to any person who reads the newspapers, watches television, or lives in a family or community where violence is endemic. My initial encounter on a personal basis was through the children in the care system whom I looked after, themselves usually victims of abuse and violence.

My felt responsibility then (as a somewhat naïve 18 year old) was to find ways of removing my ignorance, and to gain the knowledge that would allow me to alleviate such suffering. This thesis tracks the path I have taken in responding to that challenge. In reviewing the progress I have made, I realise I have to all intents and purposes failed in the enterprise. I do not, though, blame myself for the failure; as I have learned that the ignorance is not mine alone, but belongs to the human race. Most people (and arguably no-one) want at their deepest level either to experience suffering themselves or to see others suffer. Yet we all continue to live on a day to day basis, helpless except in relatively small ways to effectively address the situation.

However, my sense of responsibility has compelled me to attempt to understand what makes it so problematic for us to find effective ways to address pain, suffering and violence. Why could I not, for example, have set up a formal research project in a reputable academic department, with the stated aim of ‘discovering the causes of suffering, and the methods by which it can be prevented or cured’, as might be the case with a physical disease such as cancer or heart failure? As far as I know, there are no University departments which encourage such research. The reason why not is not too hard to fathom: we are all aware that suffering is endemic to human experience, and that pain and violence are too widespread to be dealt with by focused research projects. Perhaps more significantly, though, pain (meaning here emotional pain), suffering and violence are not viewed as located in the physical body. There is a perception, albeit generally implicit, that emotional pain and suffering are mental states, and that violence has its origins in feelings and emotions rather than being primarily a physical disease. Consequently, I was drawn to questions related to states of consciousness, which were not part of any academic study that I knew of. This returns me to the point I was making - that the focus of my concern was not one that was seen to be an appropriate subject for research in academic institutions.

Perhaps more significantly, though I could not have articulated this so clearly at the time, I knew this was a ‘whole life’ enquiry. My interest did not lie in a subject which existed external to myself, or even that I could locate solely in a specific part of my own life. This was focused on an intrinsic aspect of human life – mine, the children I worked with, and the wider world to which I belonged.

Consequently, my only option was to live out the enquiry in my life in a cyclical action research process: engage with my concerns, explore different ways forward, consider what were the relative merits of ‘different ways of knowing’ and how each might help me, gather data as a result of my engagement in different ways of knowing, make a judgement as to how to move forward, evaluate my actions identifying the learning I had gained from the experience, which I would then use to re-evaluate and modify my concerns, and guide my next phase of reflection, decision-making and actions. I stated in my introduction that my purpose in registering for a PhD thesis was because I needed the incentive and the discipline of having to creating a structure to make sense of the experiences and learning that emerged out of this process. In the end, the most effective means I could find of achieving this was to tell my story; and in so doing, provide a narrative of my learning which:

returns to present and future considerations and asks what the meaning of the event is and how (I) might create a new story of self which changes the meaning of the event, its description, and its significance for the larger life story the person may be trying to live. (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 11)

My narrative has turned out to be one that weaves here and there, reflecting the weaving of my life path as I respond to and attempt to make sense of different life experiences. I feel that it would be 'neat' to have been able to write up my thesis with a logical progression from initiating question, research undertaken, and clear conclusions drawn. But without a 'proven outcome', is it realistic or even useful to artificially create an ordered account of an enquiry which is based on experience that has no order or specific sense of direction to it?

As I come to the ending of my thesis though, one contribution I wanted to make was to propose a methodology that would allow a more structured approach to research which could include a focus on the causes and solutions to pain, suffering and violence. I would hope that no-one would see these as not being valuable topics to research; I suspect that the biggest block is that many people imagine it is probably too ambitious and unrealistic to research such aspects of our experience.

This block, I contend, mainly derives from a factor that has been a key theme in my thesis: that is, the assumptions of scientism, which have pervaded scientific research (and the mainstream cultural mindset) with their claim that the physical universe is responsible for creating all mental process. So most researchers in brain science regard consciousness as being an emergent property of the brain, with no significance for the universe at large. As identified in Chapter 10, there is still not a scientific definition of consciousness - no objective means of detecting it, no knowledge of the necessary and sufficient causes of consciousness, and no knowledge of how the brain generates consciousness. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest how consciousness emerged in the universe; consequently any individual human experience that appears to derive from consciousness (rather than directly from the physical body) remains deeply problematic. This gives rise to what is called the 'hard' problem of consciousness, **whereby scientists are unable to explain the nature of the relationship between the objective physical processes that can be observed in the brain, and the subjective mental events that people experience** (Chalmers 1996). Cognitive scientists have failed to develop rigorous ways of directly observing mental experiences such as emotional pain and suffering.

However, there have been two main justifications I have used to support my observation that there should be a wider range of scientifically respectable research methodologies than those advocated by classical science. The first is an expanded view of the universe as promoted by depth psychology, and experienced myself through my own meditative and journaling practice. I considered that these experiences made sense within a Buddhist context, and suggested that a study of contemplative practice may increase our understanding of what it means to be human (Chapter 14). The second is the challenge presented by quantum physics to research methods based on the separation of observer and observed.

I felt that a justification for the structured approach I was looking for lay in an integration of what I had learned through my spiritual practice and through my theoretical understanding of quantum physics.

Specifically, I wanted to communicate my current understanding of how a relationship between quantum physics, and an understanding of consciousness based on first person experience, has contributed to my developing a 'way of knowing' that not only 'helps me in my search for meaning'; but also (I believe) holds within it a means of enabling humanity to find a way of understanding and living in the world with happiness and joy.

"How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive for all they do," observed William James (1902: 76).

Before looking at where that desire to find a more structured approach has taken me, I first want to briefly draw together the threads of my current understanding of the significance of quantum physics, meditation, and a search for a resolution of pain and suffering.

As a lay person, I became interested in quantum physics, when I discovered that recent research findings were challenging the mechanistic view of the world that was portrayed by conventional science. An uncertain world which was characterised by possibility, probability, and interconnection, as revealed by quantum physics, resonated more with my direct experience of the universe, than the elements of predictability, determinism and certainty which were highlighted as central principles of Newtonian science. Consequently, I was motivated to learn what it might have to teach me that was relevant to my chosen enquiry.

One of the unsolved problems of quantum physics is the measurement problem. Before an observation or measurement of an event takes place, a quantum system is described in terms of probability waves. No material forms exist until an observation takes place – they exist only as mathematical abstractions. Once they are measured by technological instruments, they turn into the objectively real building blocks of the physical universe. No-one has yet been able to identify how this transition from mathematical abstraction to concrete reality takes place; but in some critical way, the observer plays a key role in transforming the abstract into the concrete.

However, the presence of an observer necessarily implies the presence of consciousness; without consciousness, no observation exists. This not only challenges the view that consciousness is merely a by-product of the brain; but strongly indicates that it plays a vital role in the formation and evolution of the universe, and the living beings within it.

The learning I gained through my study of quantum physics, and the powerful impact it had on my world view forms the theme of Chapter 7: *The Challenge of Quantum Physics within the Western World*.

My interest in the rapidly emerging field of the 'science of consciousness' was consequently reinforced by my encounter with quantum physics, and has also played a key part in this thesis (see particularly Chapters 10 & 14). An important aspect has

been my interest in first person research, with experience of consciousness being the focus of attention. In *Buddhism as a Science* (pp. 125-128) I consider meditation as a method of contemplative science which allows 'self-study' of the mind and consciousness.

Although being still and maintaining a meditative silence has always been a part of my spiritual practice and 'withdrawal' into my internal world, I have whilst writing this thesis become more interested in the specific role of meditation as a means of enabling me to access and learn more about deeper levels of reality. To investigate what others mean by 'meditation', and the different practices involved, I have for the last three years participated in five-day guided meditation retreats, twice a year, in North Wales. These have allowed me to try out and evaluate a wide range of meditative techniques. From the many methods I have practised, I find myself gravitating to the Buddhist Vipassana meditation, which I experience as being closest to the practice I have undertaken for many years, and which, in essence, requires me to still my mind and focus on my immediate experience of consciousness.

Vipassana means "insight" into the impermanent nature of the mind and body. It is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation, and is seen as a way of self-transformation through self-observation and introspection. The Buddha Dharma Education Association (website) describes Vipassana practice or 'insight meditation' as:

an experiential practice, based on the systematic and balanced development of a precise and focused awareness. By observing one's moment-to-moment mind/body processes from a place of investigative attention, insight arises into the true nature of life and experiences.

It goes on to claim that:

Through the wisdom acquired by using insight meditation, one is able to live more freely and relate to the world around with less clinging, fear and confusion. Thus one's life becomes increasingly directed by consideration, compassion and clarity.

At a very early stage in my enquiry, I was attracted to Buddhism as a philosophy, as it gave me a perspective on pain and suffering which I could relate to. I talk about this in Chapter 4 (pp. 42-43) as follows:

I discovered that issues of pain and suffering were fundamental to Buddhist philosophy, and gave an explanation for its existence that I could relate to. A central notion was that of *dukkha*, meaning pain that seeps at some level into all finite existence.

"Life (in the condition it has got itself into) is dislocated. Something has gone wrong. It is out of joint. As its pivot is not true, friction (interpersonal conflict) is excessive, movement (creativity) is blocked, and it hurts.

...Somehow life has become estranged from reality, and this estrangement precludes real happiness until it is overcome". (Smith 1991: 101-102)

As I have communicated my learning through the writing of my thesis, I have been increasingly convinced that developing a way of knowing which addresses my concern

for human pain and suffering, will be greatly supported by an integration of intellectual insights acquired from quantum physics and an understanding of consciousness gained from an exploration of Buddhist philosophy, developed experientially through meditation practice. I was reflecting on how best to communicate this in a way that would provide both an appropriate ending to my thesis, but also identify a concrete outcome in terms of a ‘way ahead’ based on my research, when a synchronistic event occurred. I have spoken about my experience of, and interest in, synchronicity on several occasions through this thesis (pp 47, 48, 105, 139) and have summarised Jung and Pauli’s explanatory account of synchronicity as originating from a domain which exists prior to the distinction of mind and matter, where matter and the psyche are perceived as alternative manifestations of a single reality. This in itself is another expression of the relevance of exploring the nature of the relationship between material and non-material dimensions of experience.

On this occasion, the synchronicity took the form of coming across (at the exact time I was reflecting on how to move forward) a review of a recently published book by Alan Wallace entitled *Hidden Dimensions: the Unification of Physics and Consciousness*. After reading the review, I was impelled to buy the book. I have read many of Wallace’s books (1996, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2007a), attended a weekend facilitated by him, and have referred to him on a number of occasions in this thesis (for example, pp. 126-128, 152, 157-158). I knew that, coming from a Buddhist perspective, having meditation as a structured part of his life, and being engaged in the connection between science and contemplative practices, his areas of research resonated closely with my interests. What he had to say would be helpful both in helping me frame my current understanding, and providing a form of expression against which to check my own understanding. Wallace is also motivated by the desire to find ways of enabling people to be free of suffering and to find greater, deeper happiness in their lives.

The reading of Wallace’s book has provided me with a developed perspective of a Buddhist orientation to understanding consciousness through contemplative practice which completely resonates with the current understanding I have gained from my learning and experience. The final closing passages of my thesis take the form of material taken from Wallace’s book interleaved with how I see it connecting with my own ‘way of seeing things’ and provisional conclusions.

Wallace challenges physicists who have set themselves the goal of understanding the objective universe as it exists independently of any relative observer, with consciousness as an influential force not being a consideration. Reality, he contends, cannot be truly understood without understanding the role that consciousness plays. He differentiates between ‘substrate’ and ‘primordial’ consciousness – the former being consciousness experienced through material form (such as the human brain); and the latter that “transcends time, and all appearances are present to it, without arising or ceasing” (2007b: 112).

Wallace derives his understanding of consciousness from the ‘Great Perfection’ tradition which belongs to Tibetan Buddhism. According to this, the

human mind emerges from the unitary experience of the zero-point field of the substrate, which is prior to and more fundamental than the human, conceptual duality of mind and matter. This luminous space is undifferentiated in terms of any distinct sense of subject and object (2007b: 48).

Substrate consciousness is what the individual experiences, and settles into through meditation. Primordial consciousness transcends time, and all appearances are present to it, without arising or ceasing. There is total knowledge and total awareness of all phenomena, without ever merging with or entering into objects. Wallace quotes Dūdjom Lingpa, who says:

Primordial consciousness is self-originating, naturally clear, free or outer and inner obscuration; it is the all - pervasive, radiant, clear infinity of space, free of contamination (ibid: 112).

I find Wallace's way of communicating his view of reality helps me clarify what I 'sense to be'. I have tried to find language at different times of this thesis to express as clearly as possible that which is essentially intangible. At the end of Part 1 (Chapter 15) I summarise my conclusion at that stage when enquiring into consciousness:

My underlying assumption is that we are interconnected with each other and with the wider universe, so that the part influences the whole, and the whole influences the part. Everything each of us does influences, even if in a very minor way, every other part. We are also each connected to a spiritual (non-material) dimension that contains a memory of all that is and ever has been. We each have the capacity to access this through a range of methods, including meditation.....

Earlier in Part 2 (Chapter 18) I quote Ferrer's attempt to express the inexpressible:

I believe that we are in direct contact with an always dynamic and indeterminate Mystery through our most vital energy. When the various levels of the person are cleared out from interferences (e.g. energy blockages, bodily embedded shame, splits in the heart, pride of the mind, and struggles at all levels), this energy naturally flows and gestates within us, undergoing a process of transformation through our bodies and hearts, ultimately illuminating the mind with a knowing that is both grounded in and coherent with the Mystery. (2002: 169)

Many people struggle to articulate their experience of the deeply profound. My main aim as always, though, is to find a form of expression that helps give me greater direction to what to do in my own life, and how to live in a way that enables me to connect as deeply as possible with my perceived source of 'a loving dynamic energy with limitless creative potential' which gives me spiritual resilience and hope for the future.

With this in mind, and connecting my experience with Wallace's notion of primordial consciousness, Wallace has more to offer me:

The way to return to the perfect symmetry of primordial consciousness is to realise how all phenomena fundamentally emerge from and are of the nature of absolute space. They have never existed except as displays of this primordial

purity, so all appearances are illusory displays of our own primordial consciousness, which has taken on the guise of ordinary consciousness. It is not that consciousness must vanish into absolute space and primordial consciousness must arise from somewhere else. It just seems that way because of our ingrained tendency to reify ourselves and all objects of awareness.

...According to Buddhist cosmogony, the form realm emerges from the formless realm, and the explicate order of the physical world emerges from the form realm....But in every instant all three of these worlds spontaneously emerge from and dissolve back into the absolute space of phenomena. Just as the nature of ice is water, the nature of everything is the unity of primordial consciousness and absolute space. Once we cease objectifying ourselves and everything else and recognise the “one taste” of all phenomena as displays of primordial consciousness, we enter into a state of meditative equipoise in which all phenomena dissolve into the great expanse, with no object, obstruction, or intentionality. (op.cit: 112-113).

The meditative practice he then describes is an accurate representation of my own meditative practice: it consists simply of “resting our awareness in its own state” with continuing mindfulness:

We release our awareness so that it is open to whatever phenomena appear to all our senses, without superimposing any thoughts or conceptual constructs onto them. Whatever thoughts occur of their own accord, we simply let them arise, without following after them or obstructing them. We attend to whatever arises with a sense of childlike wonder and freshness. When we sustain such awareness, without craving or aversion, all appearances – including all thoughts and emotions – arise as displays of primordial consciousness. (ibid: 114-115).

However, Wallace too is clear that we do not meditate for its own sake. He points out that the Buddhist tradition rejects both the materialism of modern science and the theological concept of a creator who exists independently of the universe and controls it, rewarding the good, and punishing the wicked. Buddhism provides an integrated system of theory and practice which aims to achieve genuine happiness, understanding, and virtue.

Since the root of suffering is identified as ignorance and delusion, the primary means to liberation, or lasting, genuine happiness, must be valid insight into the nature of reality as a whole, including the entire world of experience. (ibid: 120)

So here-in lies the response to the questions concerning the causes and solution to suffering. The root of suffering is ignorance; and ignorance can only be removed by gaining insight into the essential nature of reality. I have encountered these ideas before, of course – and indeed, have reflected them at earlier stages of my thesis. However, given the path my enquiry has followed, they have gained a new significance at this stage.

For the hypothesis I am now considering is that, without using contemplative methods, we will not gain the understanding of reality that we require, if human beings are to truly flourish, and live in peace and harmony with each other. Wallace quotes the German physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, who as long ago as 1946 argued in a lecture “The History of Nature”, that “the scientific and technological world of modern times is the result of man’s venturing knowledge without love.”

This approach to scientific inquiry, largely devoid of ethics and altruism ...has produced the greatest inhumanity of man against man and the greatest degradation of the natural environment. ...If we are to survive our lopsided growth in knowledge and power, which has not been complemented by a comparable growth in ethics and social responsibility, then we must take our further evolution into our own hands. We must grow in wisdom and compassion or face the real possibility of extinction. (ibid: 68)

Wallace proposes that, given the fact that scientific endeavour has contributed to destructive and dangerous activities, as much as to that which is productive and useful, any scientific theory in the future should not just be evaluated in terms of criteria for ‘truth’; but should also be judged in terms of the extent to which:

it contributes, or is likely to contribute, to human flourishing, or genuine happiness; (also) what is its potential value in terms of alleviating physical and mental illness, and how might it help develop exceptional degrees of physical, psychological and spiritual well-being?Using these three criteria – truth, genuine happiness, and virtue – to evaluate theories and methods of inquiry promises to put a human face on the impersonal countenance of science. And it may contribute not only to our survival as a species but also to our conscious evolution in ways never before imagined. (ibid: 68-69).

It would seem that in the Buddhist contemplative tradition, there lies the potential to gain knowledge of reality that can be evaluated against these three criteria. From my own personal experience and research, I have discovered access to a depth and quality of reality that certainly is not rooted in the external physical world. However, returning to an earlier point, there has been no academic setting where I can study with others in an extended systematic way what can be discovered through structured contemplative practice. Our society prioritises the value it gives to different forms research, which Wallace summarises as follows (ibid: 11):

- Physicists do not challenge the principles of scientific materialism
- Biologists do not challenge the principles of physics
- Psychologists do not challenge the principles of biology
- Scholars of religions do not challenge the principles of psychology
- Contemplatives have no voice in academia, so it doesn’t matter if they challenge anyone.

As previously stated, none of these disciplines are based on provable assumptions; all are equally open to question. The only way that scientists can corroborate or negate hypotheses related to the values of contemplative and spiritual practice is, (to return to the issue of validation discussed in Chapter 19), if they themselves engage in a relevant practice as part of their research. Otherwise, they can understand as little about consciousness and the nature of a possible wider reality as can people who want to be knowledgeable about, for example, good wines, and who read about them, observe the

brain states, behaviours and physiology of those who drink them, but who don't themselves taste them.

Although the completion of this thesis sees the completion of an extended phase in the process, my enquiry will undoubtedly continue. I have developed and evolved my spiritual practice and my way of understanding myself and the world over many years. Even though I have no ultimate answers, I have progressed my qualitative and experiential understanding of questions concerning meaning and purpose, pain suffering and violence. It may be good to be involved in a co-operative inquiry that whether academic or not, integrated theory and practice, and was more true to Heron's and Reason's model than was my earlier engagement in group inquiry. In the meantime, it seems there is much I can do to develop my understanding and learning, both independently and collaboratively, which I can hopefully continue to share with others in diverse ways.

One way of doing this would be to develop and extend my own meditative practice. Reading Wallace's recent book has confirmed for me the possible value of doing so. At the moment, I practice Vipassana meditation – the time varies, but probably at its longest an hour at any one time. Wallace says:

Vipassana has as its minimum prerequisite the accomplishment of a highly refined degree of focused attention known as meditative quiescence. Quiescence is to contemplative discoveries what the telescope is to astronomical discoveries, and any meditator who has not yet achieved it is technically regarded as a novice. The practice of settling the mind in its natural state culminates in quiescence, initially gaining access to the form realm by way of the substrate consciousness.

I feel okay about this, as quiescence, as defined by Wallace is a state I believe I have experienced for many years.

He continues:

Once one has achieved this exceptional level of attentional balance, one should be able to effortlessly remain there, with the physical senses totally withdrawn for at least four hours, with unwavering mindfulness and an extraordinary degree of vividness.

It seems that if I am to develop a greater understanding of what can be achieved through contemplative practice, I have further to go!

Of course, there is much further for us all to go. I started off this thesis concerned about the levels of emotional pain and suffering experienced by young people as a result of damaging and abusive experiences in their lives. I complete it, still concerned yet not feeling as helpless as I did when I began. I sense that we are part of an evolutionary process in which we have so much more to learn. One issue that I am convinced about, though, is that until we all (scientists and non-scientists, people from all religions and attached to no religion) realise that we need to take the possibility of consciousness as a creative principle of the universe, and become committed to learning more about it from a rigorous and structured first person perspective, we stand little hope of resolving issues of pain, suffering and violence, of finding meaning and purpose at the deepest

levels of our lives. I hope that in the telling of my story of enquiry, I have provided evidence of that contention, and will encourage others to reflect on how they might begin or continue their own personal journey to contribute to what I believe is the meaning and purpose of our existence – the evolution of consciousness.

Epilogue

So I bring to a close this narrative account of the enquiry process that I have followed throughout my adult life. It was triggered by a search for a way of knowing that would help me make sense of early experiences of emotional pain in my professional world, and provide me with answers as to how to alleviate the consequent suffering.

I was soon to discover that there were no readily available answers. The two ‘ways of knowing’ (religion and science) that were established in western cultures did not contain the knowledge I was looking for; nor did any of the academic disciplines I studied at university. My search became an inner one, through a regular journaling and meditative practice.

Through that practice I had, and continue to have, a sustaining experience of a loving dynamic energy that holds and supports me. It enables me to return to the world with renewed hope, and a capacity to perceive the limitless creative possibilities which are open to me. I discover that the connection with this energy provides me with a spiritual resilience; an ability to withstand life’s challenges with equanimity, and to perceive meaning and significance in events that hold pain and suffering. I have found a way of knowing that provides me with a sense of the infinite; I seek to hold that sense in every present moment, and to live in the world from that place.

The hypothesis that makes most sense of my experience is that I am involved in an evolution of consciousness, where the story of humanity is the story of ‘self-disclosure of spirit’ (Ferrer 2002), and the implicate becomes explicate (Bohm 1982). I have discovered that the more I am able (through my spiritual practice) to feel at one with the loving dynamic energy that is the source of my being, then the more open I am to creative possibilities, and the more opportunities arise to enable the implicate to become explicate within an integrated whole (within which synchronicities are events which demonstrate the interconnection between psyche and matter).

In engaging with this enquiry, and in finding a way of knowing that satisfies my search for meaning, I have created a rich and rewarding professional and personal life. However, the path has not been an easy one. In sharing my story, and the struggle I have experienced in responding to the initiating questions, my intention is three-fold.

Firstly, I believe that through describing my interleaving of action research and narrative inquiry, I am offering a method of enabling people to identify a path of discovery and learning for themselves, which can guide them to respond in a meaningful and structured way to challenging core life questions.

Secondly, I wish to demonstrate that it is in being ‘true to self’, and working through rather than avoiding difficult challenges that will bring the greatest rewards. We may not have final answers; but if we know there can be learning and value in suffering, then that can give us the spiritual resilience to stay strong though our own difficulties, and provide us with the patience and strength to support others who are suffering.

Thirdly, the evidence gained through this enquiry supports the notion that any claims made within either science or religion about final or universal truths are misleading. I repeat here a quotation from Ferrer, which summarises well my own experience:

I believe that we are in direct contact with an always dynamic and indeterminate Mystery through our most vital energy. When the various levels of the person are cleared out from interferences..., this energy naturally flows and gestates within us, undergoing a process of transformation through our bodies and hearts, ultimately illuminating the mind with a knowing that is both grounded in and coherent with the Mystery. Because of the dynamic nature of the Mystery, as well as our historically and culturally situated condition, this knowing is never final, but always in constant evolution. (2002: 169)

I started the enquiry being aware of my own ignorance, and with a strong motivation to eradicate it. I reach this stage, having experienced great learning - and indeed see myself in my research, both on my own and in the company of others, as a creator of knowledge and theory. However, the greatest learning is that complete knowledge is not possible, and that life has mystery at its essence. It is in embracing this mystery rather than in denying it that I have been able to create a way of knowing which satisfies my search for meaning.

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APPENDIX 1

Initial write-up of Transformative Living Inquiry Group as a ‘Co-operative Inquiry’

Planning for the Co-operative Inquiry

Although I was keen to use co-operative inquiry as a method of researching the question: *‘What would engaging in a more transformative way of living actually mean in practice?’* I had no direct experience of involvement in a long term inquiry. My only experience had been a short inquiry based at Bath University, used as a means of enabling us to become familiar with it as a methodology. There were six months in between the first meeting in Wales in October 1999, and the second which took place in April 2000. In the meantime, I met Bryce Taylor, a long-term colleague of John Heron’s, who had considerable experience of co-operative inquiry. He expressed a willingness in being a co-initiator of this process with me. I was happy for this to happen, as not only had Bryce initiated inquiries; but his background as a counsellor and as a facilitator of transpersonal processes meant that he was well prepared to respond to emotional issues that, from my reading of John Heron, I knew were likely to occur.

The facilitator is supporting the group to manifest a basic level of competence in both identifying and managing emotional states.One important thing (emotional competence) includes is having some skill in dealing with emotional distress from past trauma and oppression, so that it is not unwarily displaced into current activities in ways that distort attitudes to self, to others and to the task. (Heron, 1966: 70)

I did not feel my previous experience or training had equipped me to deal appropriately with such forms of distress.

After discussion with Bryce, and prior to the April meeting, I sent out a letter, which included the following:

I am writing to bring you up to date with the plans for the weekend ‘Co-operative Inquiry into Transformative Living’. I have been discussing this with Bryce Taylor, a long-term member of the Network, who has extensive experience in working in depth in group settings, and has published a book which explores change, development and transformation. Bryce also has known and worked with John Heron for many years – John’s writing will provide the main theoretical framework for the planning and running of the inquiry. What follows has been written by both of us.

PURPOSE AND PROCESS OF THE WEEKEND:

The vision of the Blaker Foundation was identified as being “Transforming the world through transforming self”. A core question arising out of this was: “What do we understand by transformative living?”

One way to approach our exploration of transformative living might be through response to such questions as:

1. What role does conscious intent play? How far can you will transformative change? Can transformative change happen by chance?
2. Are there certain types of transformative experiences that are seemingly a direct result of certain types of practices?
3. Do certain transformational states require previous developmental stages? What is the role of preparation to make oneself available to the experience?

4. How do we distinguish transformation from other types of emotional/personal change?
5. Is transformation always valuable and enriching?
6. Is transformation more likely as a consequence of experiencing major life events – e.g. birth, marriage, choosing a vocation, serious illness, loss of a loved one, etc.?
7. What are the effects of transformation on people's belief systems, social networks, and spiritual understanding?

It is clear from such a list of questions that the process of transformation appears to have the potential to influence any and every aspect of a person's inner and outer life. The weekend provides us with an opportunity to begin to deepen our understanding of what is perhaps an infinite topic.

Part of our intention over the weekend is to use some conscious, agreed and planned ways of attending to the beginning and ending of sessions. We are suggesting that we have one full session to exploring transformational practices that people have experienced and found useful.

Ground Rules:

In order to develop an atmosphere that encourages the development of trust and a safe space, we suggest that the following ground rules form the basis of creating a working community. These are seen to be basic - group members will have the opportunity to add to or amend these.

- Individuals are willing to take full responsibility for their own experience - willing to take part as fully and deeply as they choose and free to withdraw at any point they choose.
- No-one takes responsibility for other members.
- Individual experience is regarded as unique and to be honoured.
- All group members should demonstrate respect for each other. This should include, for example, permitting a person to finish speaking without interruption. At the same time, each member should take responsibility for ensuring that they do not dominate the group with their viewpoints, and enable each person to have reasonable 'air time'.

AFTER THE WEEKEND:

It is planned that the weekend form the beginning of a longer term project, which those attending may choose to take part in. However, there is no commitment at this stage that anyone do so.

The weekend was pleasant and informal. Most of the work was done in small groups, with people sharing personal experiences which they felt to be transformative. There was a realisation that there was no consensus about what 'transformation' meant. After an extended session where individuals tried to identify common elements arising out of the range of experiences, those proposed included:

A transformative event is one that changes the way I see the world
 It is a change in thought process and feelings – leading to a change in emotions & behaviour – a paradigm shift
 Is usually unexpected
 Is often unwelcome / traumatic
 Can be exhilarating
 Can be induced = NDE, drugs, meditation, sensory deprivation
 There is no going back! (on any kind of permanent basis)
 I cannot will it
 The immediate aftermath can be more or less comfortable
 There is a fear of not being heard or understood
 Often, the person experiencing it does not understand what is happening – there can be difficulties in finding the language to explain what is going on.

It was agreed that this was a relatively arbitrary set of responses, and that if we were to create a coherent understanding of what was involved in ‘transformative living’, we needed to develop a more structured and focused model of inquiry.

I had, prior to this meeting, written and circulated a summary of what was involved in co-operative inquiry, which I felt reflected the main principles and phases.

CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY: RESEARCH INTO THE HUMAN CONDITION

The following is a short summary of John Heron’s method of co-operative inquiry. There is no particular logical connection to be made between the different points; rather, the handout aims to provide ‘snapshot’ quotations and summaries of some key elements.

1. Heron states:

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 "Co-operative inquiry involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it. Each person is co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. (This model) is a vision of persons in reciprocal relation using the full range of their sensibilities to inquire together into any aspect of the human condition with which the transparent body-mind can engage.
 .

"Only shared experience and shared reflection on it can yield a social science that does justice to the human condition. The researcher who wants to do research on or about other people's experience of the human condition is not only likely to misrepresent it, but is open to the charge of being in flight from a full openness to his or her own experience. Moreover, the misrepresentation and the flight are likely to reinforce each other.
 .

"It seems that the human condition within myself, in relating with others, and on the wider canvas, is about increasing self-direction in living, in co-operation with other persons similarly engaged. And that this quest for personal and social transformation, for the interacting values of autonomy and co-operation, is at the heart of any truly human social science."

"A research cycle can be followed, moving between experience and reflection. This model can be applied to any aspect of the human condition (including any aspect of consciousness studies, which includes a focus on subjective experience)." (Heron, 1996: 1-2)

2. Heron focuses on methods which use "the full range of human sensibilities as an instrument of inquiry". He also differentiates between what he calls 'informative' inquiries, which either describe, explain or portray outcomes, and 'transformative' inquiries, which have practical or skills outcomes. He perceives the two forms of inquiry as being interdependent.
3. He differentiates between Apollonian and Dionysian forms of inquiry. Apollonian inquiry takes a more rational, linear, systemic, controlling and explicit approach to the process of cycling between reflection and action. Dionysian inquiry follows a more imaginal, expressive, spiralling, diffuse, impromptu and tacit approach to the interplay between reflection and action. They have in common the intentional interplay between making sense and action, and the realisation that both the meaning and the action need progressively to emerge as the inquiry proceeds. He sees the two approaches as not separate and independent, but rather bipolar and interdependent values and processes within any inquiry culture. "The polarity is between the mental and the vital, between prior shaping by thought and imaginative openness to living, creative impulse. This is a complementarity at the heart of all human endeavour." (ibid: 1-2)
4. The 4 stages of the inquiry stage are very briefly summarised as follows:

Stage 1: Determines the focus of inquiry, establishes an initial plan of action, and forms of recording. Will the inquiry be informative, transformative, or a combination? Will it be Apollonian, Dionysian, or a combination?

Stage 2: The first action phase, where co-subjects explore in experience and action the selected aspects of the inquiry focus.

Stage 3: 'Experiential immersion' – where there is a full engagement with the relevant experience / practice, and an openness of encounter with the chosen domain.

Stage 4: The second reflection stage – sharing and making sense of data generated.
5. Heron promotes a multi-dimensional account of knowledge, which rests on systemic logic, and hold that intellectual (propositional) knowledge is

interdependent with 3 other kinds of knowledge: practical knowledge (knowing how to exercise a skill); presentational knowledge (expressed through e.g. music, art, movement, etc.); and experiential knowledge (gained as a consequence of direct participation and 'being in the world').

6. Validity procedures - Heron is concerned with ensuring that researchers seek to free the various forms of knowing involved from some of the distortions of uncritical subjectivity, and hence takes the subject of validity very seriously. He explores in length and depth a set of interdependent procedures which can enhance the validity of the inquiry process, and thus its outcomes. These are equally relevant whether the inquiry is primarily concerned with acquiring knowledge about a domain, or with transforming it through practice.
7. He articulates a 'postconceptual worldview', where he seeks to articulate the radical kind of empiricism on which co-operative inquiry is based. "By 'empiricism', I mean an openness to integral lived experience which does not prejudice in a limiting way its content. This lived experience is inclusive, and is not predefined as restricted to the sense or to ideas or to any other kind of one-sided account of reality." (ibid: 178)
8. The final paragraph of Heron's book reads :
 "The value principle of respect for human autonomy requires that power is shared both in the generation and in the application of knowledge about persons. Only then can the research claim to have any human validity and human relevance. On this view, social scientists have an obligation, a duty *qua* researchers, to initiate their subjects into the entire rationale of the inquiry and empower them to become equal and autonomous co-researchers. Put in other words, doing people research involves an inescapable educational commitment: to facilitate in research subjects the development of their self-determination in acquiring knowledge of the human condition". (ibid: 208)

From this outline, people gained a sense of what might be involved in a structured inquiry. There was considerable interest expressed in using this process to focus on the question of 'what do we understand by transformative living?'

One of the key aims I had for whatever emerged out of this gathering was that it would provide optimum conditions for the development of trust, so that people would feel able to share from their deepest selves. Because of this, I considered it vital that people only agree to become a member of the inquiry group if they felt it would be priority for them, and they could commit themselves (bar unavoidable crises) to attending all meetings. I did not feel there would be benefit to anyone if individuals felt they could dip in and out depending what else was going on in their lives at the time.

There was agreement with this principle. After some discussion, a consensus was reached that a residential weekend every two months was manageable in people's timetables. From a start date in the following November, which was the earliest point where all could agree a free weekend, all participants would commit themselves to 5 residential weekends, the final one being in July 2001.

Initially, all seventeen people present at that meeting said they wished to participate in the inquiry. However, for various personal and practical reasons, in the seven months prior to the next weekend, four of these decided not to continue. Consequently, thirteen people were present at the beginning of the next weekend – the formal start to the co-operative inquiry.

An Overview of the Co-operative Inquiry

Reporting

No one person was given the responsibility for reporting the outcomes of the inquiry. It was agreed that everyone could take notes if they wished, then select to what extent they shared these over the duration of the inquiry. At various stages, individuals chose to read something they had written; on a few occasions, at the request of others, they would provide the group with copies.

This account has been written exclusively by myself, using notes that I made at various meetings. I did not consult any other member of the group prior to writing it. This means that the findings I tentatively propose are not the outcome of authentic collaboration. However, it is my intention to distribute this account to group members prior to its publication, so that their comments, views and perspectives can be included in the report.

Overview

Although it was planned that the co-operative inquiry should only run for a year, in fact it continued over a three year period, with five weekends taking place between October 2001 – July 2002, and a further three from October 2002 – July 2003. A follow-up meeting took place in January 2004.

I would summarise my understanding of what happened during the three years as follows:

In Year 1, there was considerable chaos, confusion, and emotional disturbance, as people not only got to know each other, but became familiar with what was involved in the co-operative inquiry process. During that time, three people left the group for very different reasons. Group members generally felt that slow progress was being made; and by the end of the fifth meeting, only one complete cycle of the research process had been completed.

In Year 2, the group consolidated. Although there were some interpersonal challenges and conflicts, in general these were dealt with constructively and seemed to eventually help the group move on, rather than impede progress. There was a deepening of relationship, and there appeared to emerge a more expanded understanding of the transformative process.

In Year 3, it felt to me at the time as though the inquiry had in essence ceased, and people were content to just 'be' together', feeling that there was considerable value to be gained from this. So although the formal cyclical process of co-operative inquiry was not continuing, it seemed that just experiencing being part of the group supported at

least some people in continuing the process of learning and transformation outside of the group.

Tuckman (1977) created a model of group dynamics, in which he claims that groups move through the following stages of development: forming (coming together); storming (experiencing conflict); norming (coming to agreement about group values, processes and tasks); and performing (in which group members work effectively together). I could see this progression broadly reflected within our inquiry group. During the first year, was the forming and storming; in the second year was the 'norming', which also included the main part of the inquiry; and finally in year three, the group was working well together, and providing each other with considerable support – but in the meantime, forgetting or not seeing as important the fact that we had set ourselves up as an inquiry group!! It feels indicative of what was going on during this final year that I made no records of the meetings; and yet felt that the group was still playing a role in helping me deepen the understanding I had gained in earlier stages of the enquiry.

Membership of the Group

Out of the thirteen people present at that first meeting, there was only one person, AP, whom I did not know. She had come as a result of an invitation from another group member. ER was also little known by me, and not at all by other group members. She had been part of a workshop I had facilitated some time previously, and had asked at that stage if I would let her know of other events I initiated. She had been strongly attracted to the theme of this inquiry. Seven of the group I had met through the Network - Christina, Jenny, Edwina, Gilly, Benjamin, Emma and NT; all except NT had been members of the Network local group which had been running for some time. Neither Annette nor Clare were Network members, nor had they attended any Network events; but they were personal friends who had become interested in this process as a result of my conversations with them about it. Bryce and myself completed the group.

Including Bryce as co-facilitator, there were two males and eleven women. Benjamin and Emma were partners, in their early thirties. Most of the rest of the group were in their late forties and fifties, with two women in their sixties.

Meeting Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Needs

There was a general consensus from the beginning of the enquiry that environment and quality of food were integral parts of the process we were engaged in. All present accepted that spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions of the weekend were at least, if not more important than the intellectual dimension. This meant that attention had to be given to the environment where we spent our time. We spent most weekends in one of two places: Charney Manor, near Oxford, and the Guildhouse, in the Cotswolds. Both were situated in beautiful rural locations, with open outlooks, and pleasant places to walk. I felt that the aesthetic sense of beauty added something important to the process, and enhanced the work that we were engaged in. On the one weekend we were not able to get accommodation there, we were able to stay in an equally beautiful setting.

Accommodation in all places included a lounge with sufficient comfortable seating, and good heating for winter meetings. Individual group members bought flowers, candles and other adornments. For myself at least, it felt that we were creating a 'sacred space'; that is, a space which was conducive to us experiencing dimensions of our being which lay beyond those accessible by the five senses.

Food was another significant aspect of the weekend. We operated on a 'Bring and Share' basis, with everyone contributing to one or more of the meals. Initially, we did this in an organised way, with a list being drawn up as to what was needed, and individuals putting their names against particular items. Very soon, however, this practice was dropped. Someone suggested that if we really trusted the process, then we should trust that if we all brought what seemed right for us, we would have an abundance of what we needed. There was some reservation about whether this would actually work in practice; would we not end up with, for example, ten starters and no puddings; or five jars of honey, and no bread? However, this never happened. We always seemed to have everything that was required, with considerable surplus. As someone who had little time to cook, and would usually contribute cereals, butter, and other 'basics', I was very appreciative of those who put considerable love, effort and energy in preparing wholesome and delicious soups, salads, and a variety of baked dishes.

The whole experience of eating and drinking was physically, emotionally and spiritually nourishing. We developed a practice of holding hands before each meal - a ritualistic symbol of gratitude.

Throughout all weekends, I felt one of the strongest elements was the love and care people had for each other, even when there was conflict and anger. When individuals were having difficulty with others, strong feelings might be expressed; but it was always with a motivation and will to deal constructively with the situation, and find a resolution that was good for all.

First weekend: November 2000

The first weekend was held at Charney Manor in November 2000. People arrived at various times on the Friday evening, though the formal sessions were not to start till the Saturday morning. Most of the group were not familiar with the notion of co-operative enquiry. It had been agreed at a previous planning meeting that initially, Bryce and I, as initiators of the enquiry, should facilitate the first weekend, and possibly part of the second, to introduce the basic principles and to experience a full research 'cycle'. However, once everyone was clear about the process, we should withdraw from that role, with all group members then having equal responsibility for what happened and how decisions were made.

Although everyone seemed glad to be present, the feeling I was most aware of was a general lack of certainty as to what they were doing here. It was as though they had been drawn to something, they knew not why. Few people knew each other very well: many had met for the first time at the previous weekend in Wales. Consequently, there was a major task to be achieved in enabling people to become better acquainted.

After doing an initial introductory exercise, I began by providing a historical context of 'how we come to be here' – starting from my initial attraction to the Network, and including the basis of my growing awareness of its limitations.

Bryce, in recognition that no-one other than myself, had any knowledge or experience of co-operative enquiry as a research methodology, then gave an overview of what the main purpose of co-operative enquiry was. He outlined this as follows:

You meet some-one, they ask you how you are, and you answer rather automatically 'fine'. They then ask you what has been happening. In order to answer, you have to dig more deeply into your consciousness to think about and articulate what in fact has been happening. In telling them, you become more aware of what has been going on for you. Sometimes, it takes someone to enquire about you to encourage you to enquire into yourself.

Co-operative enquiry is a group of people coming together to consciously and intentionally enquire into a question which all are interested in exploring.

For the enquiry to be useful, it needs people to be 'authentically self-directed'. However, this is not easily achieved. If each person is indeed to be this, then there is bound to be conflict within the group. It is important that individuals do not ignore this, nor be allowed to be taken along with others – and that they address upfront issues that, if not addressed, will mean that they are not acting authentically. Avoidance of difficult issues will generate emotional agendas which will impede the process until they are recognised and dealt with.

In order to help this process, it is useful to incorporate the role of 'Devil's Advocate'. This means that at any time, any group member can 'stop the process', and demand an explanation of what is going on. This may happen, for example, if someone feels that there are unacknowledged emotional issues which are getting in the way; or if they feel that someone is in some way not being authentic.

It is useful to have an agreed basic structure to the meeting – e.g. to agree that, on each occasion on first meeting, there will be a time of silence, followed by people taking it in turn to say where they are in themselves at that point in time. This prevents the group having to struggle each time to decide how to begin.

It is also useful to agree what records to keep, and who should keep them – otherwise at a later stage, when people want to remember what happened, and when/how progress was made, accurate memory will have faded.

It is also important that, although this is an enquiry not a therapeutic group, the group is prepared to deal with distress. In co-operative enquiry, the most important change is in the individual. Everyone needs to respect and prioritise this – otherwise the enquiry will be alienated from the people who are present. The research would then become divorced from the people undertaking it – which negates the whole rationale for the introduction of co-operative enquiry.

This input made an impact on the group; there followed a group discussion which was wide-ranging, and included the following:

1. An acknowledgement of the need to be authentic if this process was to be effective; and the importance of everyone being committed to this.
2. Questions of trust, like, dislike and respect were discussed – of the need to trust, if we were to move forward; of the risks that might be involved in sharing; of the fears involved in possibly being disliked by others in the group, and why it felt so important to be liked; and the thought by some that respect was more important than liking.
3. The need to feel supported when feeling vulnerable, was also raised.
4. It was accepted that, in this process, the emphasis was on people talking from their experience, rather than from their intellectual understanding. Each person would have different metaphysical systems which would shape their understanding of their and others' experiences – so at some stage it might be necessary/helpful to share these. However, these should not be dominant; and individuals needed to accept and value other people's ways of seeing the world.
5. The fear of risk was spoken about again – with the acknowledgement that no learning would take place without risk – but that if we could collectively create a safe space, then no-one would get badly hurt.
6. There was acknowledgement of the fact that the group constituted eleven women and two men. Bryce proposed that this was because in general women were more open to exploring these kind of areas in depth, and were more able to confront some of the difficult issues involved. The women in the group suggested that they experienced both men as having strong 'feminine' sides, which is probably why they felt comfortable in this context. Although there was not a long discussion on gender implications at this stage, there was a sense that this may well be the focus of a specific exploration at a later point.

Practical arrangements

During the weekend, there was time set aside to address the practical issues attached to organising the weekend. This included financial issues in relation to venue costs.

There had been one person from the seventeen attending the previous weekend in Wales who had committed to joining the co-operative inquiry group, to the extent that she had paid for the accommodation. She had then decided in the week prior to this meeting that, for a range of personal issues, she did not feel able to be part of the group. She would have liked to have been able to dip in and out of the process as she chose, although she was aware that in the agreement made by the group, this was not permissible. She had asked for her money to be returned to her, which, as she was aware, would mean that others would have to pay more. She had chosen to feed her views through one member of the group, rather than communicating with everyone. As she had played a central part in earlier stages of the process, and had been assumed to be a core member of the inquiry, this means of letting the group know of her change of mind had created strong feelings in many – including sadness, anger and frustration. There was realisation that the group was carrying a huge emotional 'burden' in terms of what feelings were collectively being held.

A complete session was spent in exploring what this was about – and in coming to an agreed decision both about the return of the money, and about how to respond if there was a request made to rejoin the process. Several people in the group would have dealt with this issue quickly – by majority vote, if necessary. However, Bryce was clear from

this early stage that issues generating high emotion had to be dealt with until everyone, with authenticity, identified that a satisfactory resolution had been reached. On one level, individuals could see it was important that no-one carry any unresolved emotional residue. However, it did seem time consuming, when there was an important inquiry about transformation that had to take place! But there was recognition that it would not help the process if people entered the inquiry feeling aggrieved that their perspective had not been heard, or that an inappropriate decision had taken place. This might affect their attitude to the group process, and adversely affect how they perceived it in the future.

Finally, a point was reached with everyone feeling a sense of achievement that a satisfactory resolution had been reached, with each person retaining their authentic sense of self. This was our first experience of dealing with an issue that raised strong emotion. There continued to be some frustration that it had taken so long to resolve; but in the process of reaching a conclusion, there was valuable learning took place about the importance of not moving on until everyone was genuinely happy with the agreed decision.

Inquiry questions

We spent time in exploring how we were going to define our individual inquiry questions, within the overall topic of ‘what do we understand by transformative living?’ This led to us sharing ideas on an informal basis as to our understanding of ‘transformation’ and ‘transformative events’. We agreed that our provisional definition of transformation would be ‘a shift in consciousness that was non-reversible’. Despite this agreement, though, it was clear that there were considerable differences in perspective as to what exactly constituted a transformational event. One person had at one time in their life been unexpectedly ‘taken over’ by an energy, which seemed to possess them for about 6 months. During this time, they were able to do extraordinary things, like ‘see’ when another person was ill – for example, be able to tell a stranger just met that he had a sore throat, even before the other person had spoken. This capacity had disappeared as quickly as it had come; but the effects of having experienced this phase had a lasting ‘transformative’ effect. Some people were aware of ‘other realities’ at various times in their lives, whether fleetingly, or for an extended period. For others, it had been major crises in their lives that had had a transformative effect – such as the death of someone close.

We spent time exploring in detail our differences in perspective. From our discussion, emerged three ‘categories’ of transformative experiences:

1. **Spontaneous transformation** – that which came as a consequence of a sudden event, from an ‘unknown’ source, apparently from ‘beyond’, outside of self. There was a sudden shift in consciousness. The state itself may last for a shorter or longer time, and was not permanent; however, it created a permanent change in the perception of self and / or the universe.

Also within this category was included that which was a consequence of a ‘this world’ crisis; an unhappy event, that forced a person to confront core existential questions.

In addition, it was recognised that transformation could be a consequence of a 'blissful' experience, when one was powerfully overwhelmed by something other than self.

2. **Deliberate practices** – people could evoke transformation through deliberate and disciplined practices, such as meditation, yoga, movement, use of voice/sound.
3. **Daily awareness** – in this category, transformation was seen to be a shift in consciousness, perhaps relatively minor, that could result at any point in any day during any activity. This was created through 'intentional and attentional living' on a moment-by-moment basis – though living consciously in the 'now'.

It was agreed that people should select which of these they could most relate to, and which they were interested in exploring in more detail. On the basis of this, we divided into small groups. Within these small groups, people identified questions which they wished to take away from the weekend with them, to form the focus of first action phase. Some of these questions were held just by one person, others by more than one person.

- What is it like to have an experience of 'oneness'? (I would like to find a way to do so, and will intentionally seek to do so. In order to help me know what to do, I will explore this area with other people external to the group, who have had experience of this.)
- What would a map of transformation experiences such as those described here look like? (I will start mapping out the whole range of transformational experiences as we have begun to map them out here; in addition, I will write down a full account of the major event that happened in my life, and will share this initially with members of the small group via email to gain their feedback on the account, before bringing it back to the large group at the next meeting.)
- I wonder what other people's experiences of transformation are? (I would like to talk to others outside of this group about their experiences of transformation – including the events leading up to it, and the impact it had on them afterwards.)
- Am I ready to process an experience I had some time ago, which had an enormous impact on me, and which to date, I have not dared even to write down?
- Can I create the spaces to support transformational experiences – and to explore ways in which I am able to do this?
- What will happen if I stay in my silence? (I don't want to think at an intellectual level about anything – I want to wait to see what emerges if I quieten my mind.)
- What is my experience of divine guidance? (As I move around my daily living, I will hold in my consciousness the question of how I experience the divine.)

These questions included elements of all three categories of transformation that had been identified; with perhaps greater emphasis at this stage on spontaneous transformation.

Evaluation

In general, the group gelled quickly. Because it had been stressed that there was now a need for 'commitment', if appropriate conditions were to be created to support an enquiry that really enabled an exploration at depth, all those present had thought carefully about whether membership of the group was right for them. Having decided to join, they were prepared to give priority to the inquiry.

In addition, most group members had done individual personal development work over an extended period of time. Many were experienced in group work dynamics, and were not unused to working with emotional agendas. Hence, in many ways, this group had an advantageous starting point. The general maturity of approach and willingness to deal constructively with difficult situations was apparent.

Although it had been agreed that Bryce and myself should facilitate the process throughout the weekend, in fact it was not necessary for us to play this role in a major way. One group member volunteered to take over the facilitation early on the Sunday morning; another took over on Sunday afternoon. Bryce made occasional interventions to inform the group of particular issues concerning the nature of co-operative enquiry, and to make people aware of specific emotional issues. However, these were relatively few.

There was no discussion, and hence no agreement made about who should record what or how; nor was the role of 'Devil's Advocate' used, other than by Bryce on one occasion.

However, everyone went away with an 'enquiry question'. It was agreed that at the January weekend, the intention would be that people return to the large group, and share their 'findings' and experiences – which would then inform the next cycle of the enquiry.

Second and third weekend – January and March 2001

During the next two meetings, I experienced a curious mix of cohesion and tension between group members. I felt intuitively that there was some purpose in this group, that it was going somewhere; but at the present moment, was not sure where that was. From what others said, this was similar for them also. There were clearly a number of emotionally-based issues that had to be dealt with. Closer alliances developed between some people quite easily – whilst others had to work through a major interchange to resolve interpersonal misunderstandings and difficulties. There did, however, seem to be a shared desire to make this process work. From the beginning, I felt there was a commitment to managing a tension that for me had been a challenge for as long as I could remember: that is, being truly self-authentic, whilst being at the same time completely open and accepting of what others bring to a group. The felt responsibility to be 'true to self' was responsible for a number of the confrontations – but in general, they were constructive, leading to mutual learning and the enhancement of a relationship. The residential dimension of the weekend helped develop the sense of group cohesion, and the opportunity to share in all aspects of living – including the relaxation with a glass of wine talking late into the evening!

However, during these early meetings, there were two people who did not feel engaged in this process, one of whom left on the second weekend, and the other on the third. Neither was able to manage the tension of self-authenticity, and openness to others – the balance between the individual and the group.

AP was the first person to leave. The reason was straightforward. She had a metaphysical perspective that she was committed to – which meant that she was not, and did not want to be, open to other people's views. She was so persuaded by her own she seemed to want to sell the benefit of it to others. It became obvious at an early stage that this was not going to happen, and her leaving, though amicable, was inevitable, given the basic values of the group.

A benefit of having AP with us, even for this short time, was that it confirmed for the rest of us how important the principle of being open to different ways of seeing things really was.

The third weekend was the final one for NT. One of her central interests was an exploration of the similarities and differences between psychotic and mystical experiences. NT herself experienced many diverse 'energies', and demanded considerable attention from the group as a whole to address her issues. Many group members did not feel comfortable with her, and in fact, contributed very little during the weekends when she was present. In order to meet NT's needs, the group had to prioritise her issues, rather than those which had been agreed by the group. Group members, although willing to be supportive, were not willing to let NT dominate. After a number of unsuccessful attempts were made to resolve this, NT herself decided to withdraw.

Two main learning points emerged out of this process. One was that, in experiencing the imbalance that occurred when one member tried to gain the attention of the group in an inequitable way, it helped the others to articulate more clearly its wish to keep the individual and group identities in better balance. The second was one that impacted more greatly on some than others. A few people were consistently disturbed by the energy that NT carried, and became aware of how this adversely affected them at quite a fundamental level. When NT left, I felt as though an oppressive mist had been lifted.

A major proportion of the time on the second and third weekends was spent on emotional issues triggered in the main by AP and NT's contribution to the group; consequently, there was little time spent on the focus of the inquiry. However, two people shared particularly startling experiences of 'spontaneous transformation'. One of these was a detailed account by Bryce of a period of about 6 months when he had suddenly developed acute psychic powers; the other was by Christina, who shared a profound mystical experience she had had, that to date she had not spoken about. The experience of sharing was profound for her and for the rest of the group. She consequently wrote this up as follows; which then became one of the tangible outcomes of the inquiry.

"I found myself floating in an ocean of golden light. From every thing within my vision this golden light radiated to every other thing in continuous pulsating streams of living vibrations. These streams of living light were visibly flowing along pathways of lasting, dynamic movement, outflowing and inflowing from and into every thing within perception, connecting every thing to every other thing. And I, too, was the golden light, and I, too, pulsated with the streams of living energy that outflowed and inflowed, inflowed and outflowed. I was infused with an indescribably beautiful sense of tranquillity and well-being; a deeply felt state of connectedness and wonderment, and bliss, and above all, LOVE. Only it was a million times more powerful than any previous experience of love,- because I AM love, and the golden light that unites everything IS love and every thing that is, is love; living vibrating love; and love is a golden light that unites everything in existence in a never ending dance, a joyful interplay of bliss and union.

In physical reality I was sitting bolt upright in bed, having woken suddenly and unexpectedly from a deep sleep. During the weeks previous I had been moving increasingly closer to the edge of burnout due to physical exhaustion and emotional pressures. To the eyes of the world, what I was going through would most likely be called a breakdown. Only that could not be further from the truth of what I was experiencing. Never before had I felt so alive, so clear, so awake, so calm, so safe. The bliss I felt was not euphoria - there was no sense of the excitement and restlessness that accompanies euphoric states was not feeling *any* emotion; there was, and is, *only love*, and I *am* love and *everything is love* and nothing is separate.

I recognised all the objects in my room - books, pictures, the vase of roses the lit candle on the dresser - but it was as if I was 'seeing' them all for the first time with a very deep knowingness, an indescribable clarity of understanding and appreciation. I was aware, also, of the world outside my window that was open to the summer night; the stars and the silent houses and the river and gardens: they too were golden, living, streaming light; and *everything is one*, near and far, beyond the night sky and the stars and in the depths of the heart. Distances dissolved; space and time had ceased to exist. How long, in terms of physical (chronos) time I remained before I 'saw' the vision I don't know. What happened next is extraordinarily difficult to describe in words (as is all of this!) but was in Blake's words: "Too beautiful to be untrue."

I turned my gaze towards the wall above the candle flame. A face appeared, head and shoulders only. Transfixed, I found myself gazing at an exquisitely beautiful countenance; beyond imagination and experience, beyond words..

The head was that of a young man or woman (in retrospect perhaps more male than female), the face framed with soft curls. What emanated from the face was indescribable beauty, love, compassion, serenity A white-gold light (unlike

any 'light' I'd ever before known) emanated from the beautiful countenance. and as I gazed the face slowly turned from side to side. As it turned the expressions changed in a continuum of gentle motion, first to one side, then the other, slowly back and forth. To the one side the expressions were varying, negative states of being; increasing in extremity and ending in utmost anguish, before slowly turning back through the same spectrum to the centre and continuing to move to the other side in ever changing expressions of positive states, again increasing in extremity and ending in utmost joy. The expressions covered seemed to include the entire span of possible human experience, from agony to ecstasy, and everything between, in perfect order - nothing was left out - insecurity, doubt, anxiety, jealousy, deceit, betrayal, isolation, loneliness, separation, aggression, fear, hatred, lust, revenge, cruelty, cowardice, remorse, guilt, grief, alienation, despair, anguish and so on and back to the light of awakening, insight, pity, willingness, creativity, honour, serenity, understanding, forgiveness, compassion, honour, courage, humility, altruism, charm, playfulness, delight, truth, sincerity, honesty, integrity, mindfulness, self-awareness, self-knowledge, wisdom, joy, love and back again, in reverse order, from light to shadow and from shadow to light, back and forth and all the time underlying the constantly shifting expressions was the original beautiful countenance of peace and unbounded love.

I don't know how long the vision lasted, nor how many times the face turned from light to shadow and back again.

It has been very difficult indeed to attempt to express in writing the experience that I can only describe as transcendent and sublime in its mystical beauty. The transcendent state of consciousness I had suddenly and unexpectedly been pitched into stayed with me for a long time - several weeks - and the sense of unity and connectedness, and perfect love, was so real and so powerful that I feel certain it was authentic."

After this account, there was a silence that must have lasted about 5 minutes. Then, group members shared what a major impact this account had had on them – and what a rich, articulate form of expression had been used. Bryce made the point that there was a tremendous cultural prohibition about both having and expressing experiences of this order – but that the vision had such power, it felt as though its truth could not be denied. Christina said that she had been very impressed by the William Blake exhibition that had been held in London, and knew that he was familiar with such visions. However, Blake had known what would happen to the western psyche if we retained the reductionist scientific paradigm. In his poetry and art, he chose to communicate a very different view of the world; for example in *Auguries of Innocence* he writes as follows:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

I felt that I had had, within the group, my first experience of a shift in consciousness that had occurred as a consequence of deep sharing and deep listening. A person's account of an experience that was profoundly significant to them had in some way entered into my consciousness, such that I was also changed in the process. Perhaps this was the essence of transformative living – the teller of the story and the deep listener participate in a process from which emerges a new reality for both.

This was an initial interpretation of my experience that I was to develop and consolidate over time.

Fourth weekend April 2001

During the fourth weekend, there was acknowledgement of how much time had been taken up during the previous meetings on emotional issues, and hence the inquiry process was impeded. It was accepted, though, that this could not have been avoided, given the agendas that had implicitly been brought into the group at the outset.

Heron identifies this as an important aspect of co-operative inquiry.

Co-operative inquiry can be an upsetting business. If the co- researchers are really willing to examine their lives and their experience in depth and in detail, it is likely that they will uncover things they have been avoiding looking at and aspects of their life with which they are uncomfortable. Indeed, many inquiry groups are set up to explore these kinds of issues. So the group must be willing to address emotional distress openly when it arrives: to allow the upset persons the healing of self-expression, which may involve the release of grief, anger or fear. Further, it may well be right for a group to spend time identifying the emotional disturbances within the group which have not yet been expressed, and providing space for this to happen. If the group does not pay attention to distress management, it is likely that the findings will be distorted by the buried emotions. (Reason: 1999)

During this weekend, after sharing thoughts and experiences since the previous meeting, individuals reviewed the questions they were pursuing, and focused on ones that were qualitatively different to those identified in week one. They were also quite diverse in nature. For some, there was an increasing consideration about the relationship between transformation and experience of a spiritual dimension.

- How much can I continue the process of introducing my spiritual beliefs into my training as a psychotherapist? How much can I be aware of the process – and how much does it carry me? In bringing the spiritual into the training that I do, how do I meet the response of my training body to how I am increasingly living and naming my spiritual practices?

- Is there a possibility of having a transformative experience without there being a spiritual dimension? How much are the two linked? If there is a spiritual dimension, what is the nature of that spirituality?
- How do you define 'spiritual'?

There was also an awareness of the presence of fear:

- What is the role of fear in creating blocks to people living in a transformative way?
- How do you create space to make room for the unknown – what enables you to respond in a way that is not intellectual – and how does fear create boundaries to prevent you from enabling this to happen?
- Fear induced physical symptoms have led me to be more diligent about practices that take me into a still space. Does fear have positive aspects that means it can lead to transformative experiences?
- What is the significance of the concepts of 'chaos' and 'saboteurs'? (this one relating specifically to the experience of NT in the group).

Whilst engaged in the rather tense exchanges with AP and NT, fear as an active energy influencing the process at a number of levels had become apparent. Over the past three weekends, I had sensed it being evident in a number of forms.

- Within AP, who was too fearful to suspend her belief system even provisionally, to allow her to understand other people's ways of understanding the world; and certainly had no wish to possibly review and modify her world view as a consequence of listening to others.
- Within NT, who could easily cross the line from material three-dimensional existence, into an unseen world of psychic energies. Although she could generally move from the psychic to the material at will, the fluidity of the boundaries caused her concern and uncertainties, and often left her feeling vulnerable and ungrounded.
- Within one individual, who wanted to share a significant experience, but had not developed sufficient trust in the group to be sure that she could do so, and stay psychologically 'safe'.
- Within myself, who had invested so much in the processes leading up to the initiation of this group, and so much sensed its potential within this group, but feared that the amount of time being spent on emotional and psychological issues, and relatively little time spent on the inquiry question itself, would lead to people being discouraged, and wishing to abandon the process.

In making statements on behalf of other people, I am aware that, although they are based on what was said, I may be presenting a perspective that the person themselves may wish to challenge. Such is the danger in co-operative inquiry when the reporting done by one person is not corroborated by others. I will return to this at a later stage, when I look at issues of validity.

The final question, from Emma, was of a different order:

- What is the role of imagination and creativity in transformation? Does the failing of imagination prevent the seeing of things and the asking of questions?

Emma was to play a valuable role throughout the enquiry in reminding us that there were methods other than talking when researching transformation; and would regularly encourage us to be more creative in our forms of expression.

Fifth week-end: July 2001

This was the final weekend of the original ones that had been planned. It was agreed at an early stage that all members felt we had covered little ground in our enquiry, given that we had been together for eight days. Dealing with the interpersonal issues that had arisen had slowed down to a great extent the process of working through the inquiry cycle during the weekends themselves. Dates for meeting during the next year were agreed.

The following is my evaluation of what I consider we had achieved by that time, using as a framework the summary of Heron's four stages in the inquiry cycle, as identified in the handout I had given to group members prior to the first meeting.

Stage 1:

Determine the focus of inquiry, establish an initial plan of action, and forms of recording. Will the inquiry be informative, transformative, or a combination? Will it be Apollonian, Dionysian, or a combination?

The focus of the inquiry was clear: we were committed to exploring the question 'what do we understand by transformative living?' This had arisen out of an agreed group vision of 'transforming the world through transforming self', acknowledging that all any one person could achieve was 'transformation of self'.

At the initial meeting, we did not discuss whether we wanted the enquiry to be informative or transformative. On one level, this would seem to be self-evident; because of the nature and origins of the enquiry, we were clearly looking for transformation of being, experienced through living in ways in the external world that enabled each of us to contribute in some way to 'creating a better world'.

There was also some acknowledgement that we hoped our learning and experience could be used to inform other people who had similar interests and commitment.

However, due to the fact that we did not agree a formal means of recording what happened, we evidently did not see this to be a priority issue for the group.

Heron also distinguishes between groups which:

- Are externally initiated or internally initiated by researchers. In the former, the initiator is someone for whom the inquiry question is not directly relevant, whereas in the latter, the initiator is personally engaged with the inquiry focus.) Only in internally initiated groups can co-researchers also be full co-subjects.
- Are full form (everyone fully involved both as co-researcher and co-subject) or partial (where external initiating researchers play a lesser role as co-subjects).
- Have closed or open boundaries. With closed boundaries, the research inquiry focuses completely on what is going on within and between the researchers. With open boundaries, people interact with others in the wider world as an explicit part of the inquiry process. Heron emphasises that individuals may conduct the action phase of an inquiry in the outside world, but if it does not involve gaining information from others directly relevant to the process, the inquiry is still operating with closed boundaries.
- Are Apollonian or Dionysian. An Apollonian culture is one which follows a logical, rational, systematic and controlling approach to the research cycle. Participants move in an orderly and linear way from one phase to another. There is a clear pattern of sequenced steps from plan to action, to observation, to reflection, then a return to planning.

The Dionysian inquiry takes a more diffuse approach to the interaction between reflection and action. When in the reflection stage, participants choose their own methods of making sense of what went on for them in the last action phase. The implications for future action are not worked out in detail through a rational planning process; they tend to emerge as a creative response to the situation.

In terms of these four criteria, the group was full form and internally initiated by myself, being a full co-researcher and co-subject from the outset. Although much of the inquiry took place within and between researchers, in effect it had an open boundary, as an exploration of 'transformative living' included being in interactive situations with others. However, only occasionally were others involved explicitly in the inquiry, although this was always present as an option if people wished. For example, at an early stage, one of the members decided to talk to people external to the group about their transformative experiences, and fed this information back to the group; but this form of gathering data was a rare occurrence.

The group certainly did not follow a planned and ordered structure. By mutual assent, requiring no discussion, we had adopted the ritual of starting each day with about 20 minutes group meditation; and also ending the weekend with a period of silence. To date, when we were not engaged in dealing with the emotional issues that had dominated the process, we tended to spend the time sharing our ideas and experiences related to the enquiry question. We had at different times divided into small groups to talk about a specific issue; gone out for a walk, holding a particular question or topic in mind; or taken 'time out' to use as we chose, whether to pursue the inquiry focus in our

own way, or do something completely different. None of these activities were pre-planned; they emerged from what was happening at the time, as a result of someone making a proposal, and others agreeing.

The first action plan had been for people to share their ideas and transformative events; and from this to categorise different types of transformative experiences. Each person then identified an inquiry question relevant to themselves, which they could explore in the external world. Heron differentiates between divergent and convergent action phases; divergent is when each person asks a different question, and explores different issues; the second is when the whole group agree to explore the same question. In the first meeting, two or three people agreed to focus on the same question. However, from that point on, people tended to follow their own individual path.

Stage 2:

The first action phase, where co-subjects explore in experience and action the selected aspects of the inquiry focus.

Stage 3:

‘Experiential immersion’ – where there is a full engagement with the relevant experience / practice, and an openness of encounter with the chosen domain.

All group members had, after the first weekend, taken their question out into the outside world, and had ‘held them in mind’ in the course of daily living. In consequent meetings, there had been opportunity for individuals to share what they had experienced. As a result, they refined the question to be pursued, before again returning to external living. As I have already identified, though, this process tended to be much interrupted by the emotional agendas that needed to be addressed. Consequently, it was not until the fifth weekend that we, for the first time, reflected on and discussed what we considered the learning so far to have been.

Stage 4:

The second reflection stage – sharing and making sense of data generated.

After eight months of exploring the question ‘what do we understand by transformative living’, which had included an ongoing discussion of what we meant by ‘transformation’, and a proliferation of sub-questions arising out of the main one, we finally allocated considerable time to articulating what we felt the learning had been so far. We did this by each person taking it in turns to identify what this had meant for them on an individual basis.

For many there was a change in how they had come to understand transformation. At the outset, most people had focused on the notion of occasional and major events which had a huge transformational effect. There was still a recognition that these did happen, and had a major significance, such as Christina’s mystical experience; but now there was an increasing realisation that transformation could be experienced on a much more continuous basis, albeit not so immediately massive in its impact. People summarised this in different ways:

- At the beginning, I was looking at this in a very left brained way. I wanted to experience ‘big events’ that were life changing. However, I have come to see that transformation can be a gradual transformation as I go along – there can

be changes in each moment. I have changed in terms of how I see transformation.

- For me, I have the image of holding fast to a golden thread, and winding it into a ball. This is the 'golden thread in consciousness'. It is entering into all aspects of my daily life – and also into my dreams. It is influencing how I relate to the world.
- I am learning to let go and trust in the current that I feel is running beneath us all – I am learning to 'let go and flow'.

A number of group members were also beginning to think more explicitly at how their learning might have an impact on their professional lives, and what difference it could make to how they approached their work. For example:

- I am beginning to see that the issue of transformation is of relevance beyond myself in my personal life; it is important to look at what it might mean for me as I work in an institution.

Some people had established a regular disciplined practice such as yoga or meditation.

- At the start of this process, I committed myself to committing myself to a regular practice. This is now less of a chore than it was, and it is reaping great rewards. The more I do this, the more enriched the experience. I am able to become more detached. I can still see the ego at work, and can get distracted by it; but it becomes easier and easier to connect to the stillness. It reduces the sense of fearfulness that was hovering around.

In general, there was an expression of the value of doing this kind of exploration with other people:

- It has been so good knowing I am not on my own in an exploration of this depth and nature.

There was also an acknowledgement that something powerful was going on:

- I have found the inquiry process is potent even when we are not too familiar with it.

So, at the end of one year, we had completed just one cycle of the research process. The learning was expressed in personal terms, rather than in information that might be useful for others. Although many people found it difficult to detail exactly what they felt the learning had been for them, there was no doubt expressed that there seemed to be sufficient potential in the inquiry to continue to engage in it over a further five weekends during the next year.

Sixth week-end: November 2001

There had been a long break since meeting in July. The group, except for ER, came together on the Friday evening; there was considerable pleasure expressed in meeting again, and feelings of connection and warm companionship.

ER arrived in time for the start of the formal session on the Saturday morning. At an early stage, she said:

What I say might sound jumbled. I have one perception – then it changes. I have for a long time had a problem accessing my feelings. I emailed Clare in August asking her what Love is. Then I fell the other side of an oak door – with my husband. I have been looking for love in the wrong direction – outside, rather than inside. I have just come to realise that in fact, I have love with and for him. At first, I felt euphoria. I realised that I am two people. There was part of me watching me feeling the feelings. One part was wiser, a slightly detached being – watching the other dealing with feelings – not only love – but also fear – and trust. The other part was experiencing all feelings – negative as well as positive – and integrating them. Every moment I am learning.

This led to a discussion which identified that ER's needs differed from those of others in the group. Her perception was that everyone else present was interested in exploration of the spiritual; whereas she was more focused on emotional issues. She stated that what she most needed now was to spend time with her family. She thanked the group for having helped her get to this stage, which felt a positive one for her. In turn, group members expressed their appreciation for what she had contributed to the group. ER left, in a way that all felt to be constructive and 'right'.

The final member to leave the group had done so. There was a general consensus that Elaine was accurate in her analysis; and that it had been courageous of her to come to the group to say in person what she wanted to say, rather than speak to someone by phone about it. It also highlighted the need, when looking at transformative living, to differentiate between that which was emotional / psychological, and that which was experienced as spiritual / transpersonal.

As over four months had passed since the last meeting, considerable time was spent sharing stories about what had happened during these months, relevant to the inquiry. It was then agreed that, as a recognition of starting a new inquiry cycle, we should revisit what, in the light of the learning and experience so far, we felt was the purpose of the group; and what the group had to offer each individual. The following is a summary of all the contributions. The emphasis has been added by me. When reflecting on these responses, it seemed that participation in the group was providing people with much needed support, the courage to face fear and take risks, and the encouragement to enter more fully into their inner depths of themselves. I have highlighted the words that indicate this.

- I am look for internal shifts that would affect the nature of what goes on for me in the outside world. Coming to these weekends is a catalyst for my own transformation – a **reassurance** that I am not going down a blind alley – I don't want to be too introspective. The group provides an **undergirding** which allows me to transform. I am aware that there is a considerable difference between intuition and psychic interference – and I am learning how to access my intuition. We have talked in the past about spiritual practices – and I have been reflecting on the idea that possibly this group meeting is a spiritual practice? **The whole process is allowing me to enter more fully into my own being.**
- In looking at what we understand by transformative living, I have become interested in what it means to have a relationship with the divine. I am exploring this idea –the group provides me with the **support** that allows me to explore it. It provides me **with a form of security that allows me to go deeper into the unknown than I might otherwise have the courage to do.** It also gives me sufficient confidence in the validity of what we are involved in to be much more free about who I am and what I am doing in my normal professional world – with a consequent impact on what is happening at work, which seems at the moment to be very positive.
- I thought that what we would be doing could lead to the production of what might be the equivalent of the 'Ladybird Guide to Transformation'! I would still like something written down to guide others – but – everyone's journey is unique. It is difficult to describe in words. It has confirmed the idea that it is best seen as a spiritual journey. **The group has given me the chance to take the risk of moving forward. I feel sufficiently loved and trusted to take that risk.**
- I can relate to the idea of undergirdng – that is, **support.** **Belonging to this group enables me to navigate my 'soul-boat' with the freedom I believe in (but which can be dangerous).** It is exciting and terrifying – holding the rudder – remaining open to possibilities – getting help in keeping the boat on course. I have done a lot on my own in the past; and a lot in groups with set structures. However, **this group provides a sense of unity** that I have not previously experienced - a unifying quality. It is a way of bringing my self back on course – there is a definite sense of purpose (my diva vista).
- The group has been many different things for me. Individual members have done much outside the group in different contexts. I have often felt alien in the group. Sometimes I am not sure if I am being understood– but at least I have been able to try. **It has been a kind of anchor in that 'sea of transformation'** – a place to come back to – to experiment – to refocus. I am currently feeling in a place of immense potential – and I don't know where it is going. The journey never ends – but I feel I am moving on to work from a place of lightness rather than a place of darkness. I feels 'enlightened' as a kinaesthetic / bodily feeling – for the first time, it feels unwavering. I don't know everything. But I am now looking at what it will mean when I start translating my increased sense of awareness into action in the external world.
- When I first joined the group, I was looking for the 'big transformation'. I was interested in undertaking research into what it meant for people outside

this group. All that has changed. **Transformation is not 'out there'; it is inside** – it is 'coming back to a place and knowing it for the first time'. **It is going out through going in.** The external is in the now. It is part a 'beingness' in everyday life – it is in everything – it is everyday life.

- One finding of this process is that – questions from other members of the group are important parts of the process. I have on a number of occasions realised that a process that one person goes through is triggered by a question that another person has asked.
- Why was I interested in the initial enquiry question? My wish would be to embody truthfulness – perhaps make a difference in the external world. I never wanted to join a religious group, to be categorised. Many people explore ways of being in touch with God without following a particular spiritual path. Is there an answer to the question we have set ourselves? I don't know whether much has happened for me. The feedback has been welcome. **I have felt isolated with feelings for many years – and don't feel so as much now.**
- The group creates a mirror for my processes. **It is important to get confirmation that what I am experiencing is real.** I feel the role of creativity and imagination is crucial in transformation.
- At the moment, I feel I am waiting rather than making an effort (but that is not the same as being idle). I am poised on the edge of some transitional stuff in terms of my external life. My sons will soon leave home – so being a parent with responsibility for day to day caring is coming to an end. I have an ambivalence about this.
- The purpose of the group is to stop me going mad! I feel there is so much happening to me on a day-to-day level that feels totally disorientating, that **it is good to come here, be able to share what is going on – and know that I am not on my own.**

The next question that was asked was: *“Where do we go from here?”*

The group agreed that a finding of the enquiry so far was: **The more you explore the idea of transformative practice, the more you find you need to explore the idea of the divine.**

This then led to the question: *“What do we understand by the word 'divine', or 'divine guidance'?”*

Responses included the following:

- That of which I am a part, and that which is a part of me.
- Grace has much to do with divinity.
- Clarity of truth – it can manifest at any time, in any form of expression.
- To do with the wholeness of 'being me' – the outer and inner are the same.
- The Divine is that in which I am whole.
- I feel awestruck. We talk about divine guidance in a pragmatic manner. But Christina talks about Grace. Grace is not about deserving / not deserving. I am the light as well as seeing the light.

- The experience of light is important I remember this in childhood hymns – for example, 'this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine'. If you let out the light through communicating, there is a synergistic effect – one person wakes up the other.
- It is important for me to open to the 'beyond'. The more open I am to the divine, the more I expand – and the more I meet and connect with others.

Seventh, eighth and ninth weekends

During the following weekends, the group became increasingly cohesive. From the outset, there were often times when there was a sense of tranquillity and peace. At the start of the formal session on the Saturday morning, there was a shared sense of depth during the meditation.

There were also, at times, incidents where differences of perspective were highlighted. However, it seemed that difficulties were able to be resolved much easier than earlier in the process. More significantly, there were an increasing number of occasions when people were expressing a much greater sense of connection, and a feeling that 'the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts'.

One person's reflection included the following:

Transformation is always present - everywhere in every moment. It is tangible and vibrant. Children know that and live in their own fantasy - which society partially shapes with the world of imagination it offers the children . . .

But later on, the boundaries are set that prepare the human being for the real constraints of mainstream reality - which includes playing a useful role in society - So the connection to the transformative world becomes lost - imagination dwindles.....

How do we distinguish between fantasy and what we are concerned with here - 'spiritual transformation' ?

We have a level of spiritual reductionism - so as not to get lost 'on the astral plane', in the world of fantasies which penetrate both 'what is' and mainstream reality .

What we are talking about surely has a lot to do with the way in which we set our boundaries ...

Freedom is not only frightening - it is also a very real challenge . . .

The topic of transformation is too vast to be categorised – though not too vast to be explored -

The million-thousandfold stories of human lives will all contain traces of transformation -however far they may be removed from 'illumination'.

When we come to transformative living - which might express a more active engagement in transformation - the human expressions thereof are still too vast to categorise.

So - as always - we are best off starting with ourselves and our own stories - though these should not be separated from those of other human beings, fully interwoven - but without the pretence of dictating the path for others.

As to our enquiry to date - I must say that I find it difficult to summarise an overall impression. I have certainly learnt that there are many ways of living with transformation. Time is of little concern for the broad stream weaving.....

Tenth Weekend

This was the final meeting of the second year. We had all gathered at the Guild House, arriving in our own time on Friday evening – good food, wine, a general buzz of conversation. There was a tangible sense that it was good to be together again.

Each person got up in their own time. For one or two, that was rising at dawn, and wandering outside for the fresh morning air. For others, there was the luxury of sleeping on, not under pressure to keep to the timescales of a normal working day. We share a nourishing, convivial breakfast – the sun shone, as we looked over wonderful views in the Cotswolds.

Soon after 10.00 a.m., we came together in the space round the large open fire – not lit now during the summer warmth. Christina started by reading from John Donahue's *Anam Cara* :

A BLESSING FOR PRESENCE

May you awaken to the mystery of being here and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence
 May you have joy and peace in the temple of your senses
 May you receive great encouragement when new frontiers beckon
 May you respond to the call of your gift and find the courage to follow its path
 May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame and anxiety never linger about you
 May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul
 May you take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention
 May you be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul
 May our experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder

We then, by mutual unspoken agreement, moved into a twenty minute meditation.

When we returned our attention to the group, it was acknowledged that this was the last planned weekend. It was time to rest and review, before moving forward again.

One person summarised what she thought the learning had been for her:

“Transformative living is to do with space – creating space for transformation to happen. The greatest gift you can offer another is to create the space for her or him to create their own dance. But first you need to make the space within your own heart. Transformative living is creating space within self, and for other. There is a Sufi saying: ‘If I create a green bough within my open heart, a singing bird will come’. It is when we are fully in presence that we truly dwell in our own space – which is boundless.

This for me was another form of expression of my continuing sense that when two or more people trust each other sufficiently to share from the deepest levels of their being, a transformation in consciousness takes place for both. When this quality of relating takes place amongst a number of people over an extended period of time, a new form of internal reality is created; a new experience of consciousness.

Other people also felt there to be significance in the process:

- I feel that transformative living is about infinitely creating – with no overall predetermined outcome, and disinvesting self of an expectation of another. It is important to keep hold of that inner space.
- I think of the metaphor of the sea – when you dive beneath the surface, you enter a different space.
- When I am with the group, I feel as though I am in this underwater world. When I live in this level of consciousness with other people, I feel that my own experience of my inner world is validated. And when I live from this place in the outside world, I have a different effect on those around me. This group has helped me believe in this process – it has cleared out a lot of the clutter I was carrying.
- I have often felt as though I lived in ‘two worlds’ – the world of that ‘inner space’, where there is a timelessness, and no boundaries; and the external world, where there are practical expectations to be met. When one enters the external world living consciously from the inner one, a different order of things happen.
- This process allows the person to develop their own inner authenticity. On your own, you may feel there are two levels. To come into the group, and to share that creates a shift in consciousness.
- It has been good that each person can completely and with trust talk about who I am, what I am, where I am going, with others who are totally accepting.
- It is good to be able to share questions that come from the deepest levels. Life has often felt lonely at the deepest levels – but now it doesn’t.
- The group has acted as an anchor – which is different from a boundary. A boundary limits, restricts. An anchor means that you can move out as far as you wish, but you always have the means to return to the known – it prevents you getting lost and cut off.
- This group gives me the security to go out there and have the courage to do things I wouldn’t otherwise feel able to do.
- The stronger the consciousness here – the more I feel able to have the confidence to go out there.

- It is only my inner space that I am personally responsible for – everything else will flow from that. There is a Sanskrit saying: “Vigilance is the abode of eternal life’. Be mindful, awake in each moment.
- Within this group, I have a felt connection with friends – and with others who are working towards the good in the world.

During a quiet space in the weekend, I wrote the following as a form of reflection for myself – not shared with the group.

When I journal, I go into my own space – I access and enter into a different state of consciousness – and feel that I am immersed in something that is not yet manifest in the world. With the group, we are doing that together. It is as though, having come together and sharing, often at a deep and intuitive level, we collectively generate a different state of consciousness.

What is the reality that is at the base of who I am and who we are? I do not know – and I do not think I need to know its exact nature. I only need to know the qualities, and in what ways I can allow them to enter into me and through me. But first of all, I need to completely accept that it is there for me – for all of us. My experience is – once I surrender to its existence, there is a transformation of consciousness. And when I live from that place, different things happen.

If this is a research enquiry, seeking to discover that which is not currently known, how can I provide evidence to demonstrate the validity of my findings? I know I cannot prove any of it. But each person has the choice to enter into a process of this kind, and test it for themselves.

What have I learned about what I need to do in order to continuously engage in transformative living? I have always known that I cannot learn this by observing others, and analysing their behaviour from without. I can only do this by going within, and allowing what is there to emerge in whatever shape or form it chooses.

The road to transformation is not an easy one – all the great myths and spiritual traditions say this. But there are huge rewards to be gained – the myths and traditions say that also. We gain the courage to engage in the exploration of what is possible through the stories of others; these may be sufficiently convincing to persuade us to enter into the unknown - to truly listen to that which comes from within. It was my rational mind that used to challenge my inner voice, and placed limits on how much it allowed expression to that voice. The inner voice was not able to overthrow the rational – my fearful ego would not allow that. What I needed was for my perception of the possible supremacy of the rational to be knocked off its pedestal by language stated in its own terms. So when I discovered that I had been infected by the logic of scientific materialism; and realised that that logic – the one that argued for the supremacy of the rational - was based on a false premise – then I could place it in perspective, and the inner voice could have its freedom.

This establishes a different relationship between the intuitive and the rational. As I now see it, the role of the rational is to service the intuitive. It can be put to work to see how the message of the intuitive can be made more truly manifest in the world.

We seek to achieve wholeness and harmony in the external world. Through spiritual practices, we can go within, and experience the peace and stillness to be found there. When we emerge from that place, we can enter into the world, carrying that sense of peace with us. As within, so without.

Action research as a methodology allows us to integrate the external and internal, the action and reflection, to ensure that what I do in this moment emerges out of the moment just passed. It is a form of Jack Whitehead's Living Educational Theory, in which his enquiry: "How do I put my values into practice?" is located for me within a broader question: "How do I realise in my external life my sense of relationship with an internal spiritual source of Love and Wisdom – and ultimate Unity – that connects me to all aspects of existence?"

I move around the world holding in my consciousness a sense that I am connected to each and every person I meet – and seek to act from that place.

Developing forms of research such as the co-operative inquiry, of which I have been a part, acknowledges me as a participant in the world, where my every action affects the whole – where I seek to discover that which will support the unfolding of the universe through discovering how to unfold that which lies latent within me. I and the world are one – as soon as I separate myself from it, I diminish both myself and the world.

November 2002 – July 2003

During this time three residential weekends were held. Initially, it had been decided to have longer meetings (three days rather than two), but to have them on a less frequent basis. In practice, this did not work out, as several people were unable to absent themselves from work commitments on the Friday.

In terms of the co-operative inquiry, however, there was a recognition that the cycle had broken down. What we seemed to have was the essence of a community which, to a greater or lesser extent, gave each of us continuing strength and support to continue to live out our lives and develop our spiritual practices in the external world. However, we had ceased trying to analyse exactly what was going on. It was as though the experience was 'good enough in itself', and did not require analysis.

Each weekend would follow a similar pattern. After the initial silence and group meditation, the first day would be spent on individuals sharing their stories as to what had happened since the last meeting; and identifying any difficulties that had arisen during that time. As time progressed, the depth of the sharing became greater; it was as though people had learned that they could sufficiently trust the process to talk about any particular challenges on their 'spiritual journey.' There would then be the opportunity to dialogue about issues arising from that sharing. Generally, the whole group would stay together; however, on occasions we would break up, and either individually or in

small groups, engage in a practical exercise that drew on people's imagination and encouraged different forms of creative expression.

When we came to the last meeting, it was unanimously acknowledged that the enquiry as a structured process was not happening; consequently, we should formally bring it to an end. However, there was a recognition that we had created something very special. It seemed we had created a 'group consciousness' that was powerful to experience; and which acted as a source of support and nourishment for the individuals who were part of it.

A number of people present were keen that what had developed within the experience should not be lost; and that it should be possible to move on to a different kind of inquiry, which explored the potential of the group consciousness. However, not everyone wished for this to happen; so it was suggested that a period of time should be allowed to pass, before planning a 'next phase'. If that were to happen, it would be the opportunity to form a different group. In the meantime, it was agreed that this group meet for a weekend twice a year, purely as a support process, to continue the sharing and connection that had been felt to be so valuable. Heron confirms the role and value of this when he states:

A disadvantage in the spiritual and subtle field is that short inquiries do not constitute any kind of sustained practice. Nor do they provide for the ongoing support, fellowship and collegial spiritual power of an established school. One solution lies in establishing autonomous peer groups for long-term spiritual practice within the self-generating spiritual culture from which co-operative inquiry itself has emerged. (Heron 1998: 231)

Evaluation of the Co-operative Inquiry

This reflection is being written fifteen months after the last formal meeting, when it was agreed that we had completed our inquiry in relation to the initial question ‘what do we understand by ‘transformative living?’ Since then, we have had one ‘support’ weekend in January 2004. We plan to meet again in November 2004. We have agreed that at this meeting, we will spend time exploring in a more structured way what the learning has been for us, both individually and collectively. It is my intention that group members will be invited to read what I have written about the inquiry prior to the meeting; and that any responses I receive from them plus a report on the weekend will be added to the account.

At this stage, however, I include an analysis of the group from two perspectives. Firstly, I evaluate what happened using John Heron’s criteria as a framework. Secondly, I have written a personal reflection, which focuses on my experience of the co-operative inquiry located within my more extended life enquiry. In doing this, I seek to make connections between the individual and the collective; also between the intellectual and the experiential.

Both accounts represent only my perspective.

Evaluation of the co-operative inquiry

Heron, in his analysis of co-operative inquiry, spends considerable time exploring how the issue of validity can be addressed in this form of research. He does this by introducing a number of procedures, the aim of which is to “free the various forms of knowing involved in the inquiry process from the distortion of uncritical subjectivity”. (Heron, 1996: 59) I have used these procedures to form a framework for a formal evaluation of the process.

Research cycling, including divergence and convergence

Mainly because of the emotional issues that needed responding to in the group, there was only one research cycle completed in the first year. Thereafter, there was an ongoing cycle of identifying a question within the group, working with it in the external world, returning to the group and reflecting what had happened in the meantime, sharing any perceived learning, then refining the question. However, there was a loose structure to this; and like so much else in relation to the conceptual framework of co-operative inquiry, there was not much emphasis placed on explicitly reminding ourselves what stage we were at in the cycle at any one point in time; nor on ensuring that we moved through each stage in a systematic and planned way. In addition, my perception was, listening to individual reflections, that some people were more focused than others on their questions during the experiential ‘in the world’ phase. However, I felt there was an appropriate balance between the reflection and action phases. Having a full weekend every two months seemed to work well, with no-one expressing any view that either the gap between meetings was either too long or too short, or that the time for reflection and sharing was not right.

In the action phase, the emphasis was certainly on divergence, as, after the first couple of meetings, everyone tended to take away a different specific question. Over time,

these became significantly different, reflecting the individual life paths of the individuals. However, all could still be located within the initial question, “what do we understand by transformative living?”, which continued to provide a coherence to the whole inquiry. During the weekend meetings, there was more emphasis on convergence, as most of the activity was done in a large group. On occasion, we would work as individuals or as small groups, but this was relatively rare.

Authentic Collaboration

John Heron identifies this as follows:

One aspect of this is that group members internalise and make their own the inquiry method so that they become on a peer footing with the initiating researchers. The other aspect is that each group member is fully and authentically engaged in each action phase and in each reflection phase; and in each reflection phase is fully expressive, fully heard, and fully influential in decision-making, on a peer basis with every other group member.

I felt that there was a high level of authentic collaboration from an early stage. Although Bryce and myself were seen to be formal ‘facilitators’ until others were familiar with the process, it seemed that we were not required to fulfil this role for long. Everyone had different skills and abilities relevant to the focus of the inquiry, and would introduce these at different times. My sense was that each person felt able to participate fully, and that, certainly from the sixth meeting onwards, felt fully heard. I was aware, though, that the group did not necessarily work in a preferred way for all. For example, Emma, naturally a very creative and imaginative person, would state on many occasions that perhaps we could use a range of methods of exploration, and of presenting our findings, alternative to talking, such as art or drama. Once or twice the group responded to this; for example, one weekend a collage was created. However, in the main, we spoke. Heron himself suggests that there are many alternative forms of expression within co-operative inquiry, and perhaps we should have explored them more. The greatest amount of time, though, was sharing experiences through the form of the spoken word.

Challenging Uncritical Subjectivity

Heron mentions the use of ‘Devil’s Advocate’ as a means of presenting a challenge to what is going on in the group. This technique was used explicitly on two or three occasions near the beginning of the group; and implicitly in later stages. Although challenge never ceased to be a part of the life of the group, it certainly in the latter stages decreased in terms of frequency, and apart from one or two rare examples, in intensity. I do not think this was because people were deliberately avoiding difficult issues. However, using ‘story’ as our main means of communication, with the deep listening seen to be an important part of the process, there was a general principle of accepting a person’s story, without being critical of decisions they were making, or of areas of exploration they were choosing to engage in. My perception was that challenge was mainly used as a means of questioning any intellectual conclusions drawn as a consequence of experiential engagement. For example, if there was a move to interpreting the world in very positive optimistic terms, there may well be a sharp reminder that there were many terrible things also occurring across the planet; if there appeared to be a level of ‘smugness’ conveyed in relation to a person’s relationship with the ‘divine’, there may be a response which indicated that the ego was still present, and

should not be ignored. However, from my perspective, I was not aware of issues central to the inquiry that were not dealt with.

The management of research counter-transference: dealing with unaware projections

This played a major role in early meetings, and was, I felt, dealt with fully. From the beginning, difficult situations and interpersonal conflicts would arise. Bryce would not allow us to avoid these, and was committed to us achieving an outcome that everyone could truly own, rather than, for example, allowing a majority vote, leaving some people dissatisfied with the outcome. Perhaps because of this, I felt that there developed an ethos where, in the main, people felt able to express any negative or distressing feelings, trusting that the group would respect and deal with them constructively.

The relation between chaos and order

Chaos was evident in the early stages. However, from the beginning of the second year, this was minimal. There was generally a cohesion in the group that seemed to emerge from the nature of the inquiry we were undertaking, and was a consequence of the 'transformational experience' we felt we were involved in. I experienced this as a positive aspect of the group functioning.

Personal reflection

At the beginning of the co-operative inquiry, the co-researchers and co-subjects met somewhat hesitantly to engage in a process they were unclear about. Initially, in dealing with the emotional issues that arose, three people chose to leave the group. The nature of the group seemed to change quickly after the third person had left. Looking back, it seems to me that there then emerged a much more explicit and accepted relationship between transformational living and connection with a spiritual / non material reality. This had been there implicitly at the beginning, as one of the factors that had brought the group together was the agreed acknowledgement of a 'spiritual reality'. However, because what was meant by that had not been spelt out, the differences in perception were too great to enable common ground to be developed. AP wanted to persuade others concerning her metaphysical belief system, which she was not prepared to critically question in any way; NT sought extended group time to help deal with her psychic challenges; and ER decided that it was actually her emotional rather than spiritual life that she wanted to devote attention to.

It took a year for the group to stabilise. Once it did, it seemed to quickly develop an effective means of communicating and sharing.

It was only when writing up this inquiry many months after its ending, that I realised how little the process had been informed by conceptual frameworks. At the outset, potential co-researchers had received the paper that I had written on Co-operative Inquiry, which described the basic theoretical principles and structure. From the outset, there was considerable emphasis placed on the experiential dimension; that in being

‘co-subjects’ as well as ‘co-researchers’, participants would be prepared to bring their whole being to the inquiry.

Bryce gave some detailed input about the methodology during the first meeting; and occasionally, thereafter, either he or I would insert some conceptual information to inform an aspect of the process that was happening at that point. At one meeting in the second year, I photocopied a fairly extended section of P.W. Martin’s *Experiment in Depth*, which I felt illuminated what was happening in the group at that point in time.

However, apart from this, there was little attempt to introduce ideas and concepts that did not arise out of our immediate experiential involvement in the project. This meant that the concepts which formed the framework of evaluation in the previous section, such as divergence, convergence, and authentic collaboration, were never introduced into the process; nor was the theory which informs co-operative inquiry ever fully explored. In this sense, then, it can be said that the principles and structure of co-operative inquiry provided the framework for our exploration; but that we have not used our experience to date to evaluate the value of co-operative inquiry as a method in its own right. Perhaps that can be put on the agenda for our November meeting.

One of the questions I asked myself when starting this reflection was: should we have been more planned and structured in our use of co-operative inquiry? As the initiating researcher, should I have been more conscientious in developing and sharing a conceptual understanding, both of its theoretical origins, and of the validity procedures that Heron perceives as so central to the process? I was aware that, on several occasions during the three years, the question had been raised by one or other of the group as to whether we were sufficiently attending to the rigour of the research process. However, I cannot remember anyone suggesting that we return to the literature, and use that to provide us with a structure for the articulation of our learning; or use it as a resource for suggestions as to how we might move on to the next phase. Having returned again to the literature at this stage, I realise that there is substantial information that could have been fed in, and possibly influenced the development of the group. Would this have added anything of value? It may well have enabled a wider range of informative outcomes. My question is: would it have had an adverse effect on the richness of the transformative outcomes?

My personal view is that probably it would have done. From the beginning of the inquiry, I sensed that there was great resistance to an inquiry that had too strong an intellectual dimension. Certainly that was there within myself. My motivation to initiate the research had emerged out of my experience of Scientific and Medical Network events, which I found to be focused on the intellectual to the virtual exclusion of the experiential. As the notion that there was an urgent need to challenge the scientific materialist world view, and replace it with a spiritually informed one, lay at the heart of the origins of the Network, it seemed to me that this would require a transformation of consciousness. This could not be achieved through the intellect alone; it had to involve the ‘whole person’.

Given that we were seeking ‘transformation of self’ as a means of contributing to a ‘transformation of the world’, then the question ‘what do we mean by transformative living’ was developed as a means of exploring transformation of self. Thus, in essence, it was an experiential question. There was explicit acknowledgement at the beginning

that we would not gain appropriate responses through intellectual methods, and hence, although concepts, ideas and belief systems may be discussed, they should only be so in relation to the experiences being shared and explored. Being the initiating facilitator, and there being a strong awareness from the group that this inquiry had arisen as a consequence of my involvement in the Network, I was wary about having too strong an influence on the development of the inquiry. The principle of equal responsibility for the group was one held to be significant by all; and my personal commitment was to ensure that my ideas did not influence the structure and process more than the ideas of others. I believe I achieved that intention; although it is probably more appropriate for others to make comment.

However, I feel it is useful at this stage to return to Heron's rationale for co-operative inquiry and to the conceptual framework that both informs and is informed by it, in order to review the relationship between his thinking, and my experience.

The relationship between personal lived inquiry, co-operative inquiry, and spiritual experience.

Heron sees co-operative inquiry as a relatively short term complement to the long term process of individual lived inquiry. By lived inquiry he means "simply the active, innovative and examined life, which seeks both to transform and understand more deeply the human condition." (Heron 1998: 17)

Heron contends that:

An increasing number of spiritually minded people are currently busy with their own lived inquiry, and are seeking open and constructive dialogue about it. I call this social phenomenon a newly emerging and self-generating spiritual culture. It is a loose, informal network of individuals and groups who are creating their own spiritual path from a diversity of ancient and modern sources. It involves a growing and significant minority of people across the planet....The human race stirs itself to fulfil the legacy of the Renaissance: the idea of the free and self-determining human person, active in all spheres of human endeavour. (ibid: 2)

He names three interrelated criteria which identify people in this self-generating spiritual culture:

- They affirm their own original relation to the presence of creation, find spiritual authority within and do not project it outward onto teachers, traditions or texts.
- They are alert to the hazards of defensive or offensive spirituality, in which unprocessed emotional distress distorts spiritual development, either by denying parts of one's nature, or by making inflated claims in order to manipulate others.
- They are open to genuine dialogue about spiritual beliefs and to collaborative decision-making about spiritual practices undertaken together.

I could relate to all of this. My ‘individual lived inquiry’ seeking ‘both to transform and understand more deeply the human condition’ had been the main motivating factor through my life; and my meeting and dialogue with others following a similar journey had reassured me of the significance of our mutual endeavours. Engaging in the co-operative inquiry with some of these others had confirmed for me that:

There is a new kind of initiation afoot. It is not the other-directed initiation of learning, sanctioned by external authority, about how to be proficient within a pre-existent spiritual culture. Rather it is a self-directed initiation of inquiry, grounded in internal authority, a lived inquiry that is both individual and co-operative, an inquiry about the emergence of temporal divine process as an innovative self-generating and self-transforming culture. (ibid: 41)

I could also fully agree with Heron when he suggests that the impact of the method is an affirmation that spiritual authority is within, and that it guides our path in association with others. Spiritualization is about the ‘creative spiritualization of the person, and personalisation of the spirit’, in the context of collaboratively working together to care for our planet ‘within the cosmic whole’. (ibid: 230) This process challenges the controlling hierarchical authoritarianism that is dominant within so many of the spiritual belief systems that currently have an active presence in the world; and which, indeed, form the rationale for violence against individuals, and wars between nations.

One of the experiences of the co-operative inquiry group was that it had not resulted in as many ‘informative outcomes’ as we might have originally hoped or expected; we had not, to quote the words of one member, produced the ‘Ladybird Guide to Transformation’. I had myself questioned why we had not been able to create a greater amount of substantive ‘knowledge’ which could be meaningfully shared with others who were not part of the process. Heron puts this in an acceptable context for me when he says:

In these early days, the overall impact of the method is for many people an important transformational outcome, as much as any particular outcome to do with the focus of a given inquiry. This impact is about spiritual self-discovery, about the affirmation of internal spiritual authority, of autonomous creativity in choosing and following a spiritual path. It is about the intimate connection between indwelling spiritual and open inquiry, between inner liberation and mutually respectful, co-operative spiritual exploration with other persons. (ibid: 230)

All members of the group had felt that experientially they had gained much from the inquiry, even though it was difficult to clearly articulate in propositional form what the learning had been. Perhaps, though, at this stage, informative outcomes were not the priority. Perhaps what was important was our commitment to our respective spiritual journeys, the willingness of each of us to cooperate with others similarly engaged, and our desire to reach out to others still unaware of the possibilities.

This calling, this transformative obligation, on a confused planet, cannot wait upon elaborate informative transpersonal inquiry; just as the obligation to raise one’s children cannot wait upon the findings of elaborate child-care research. One solution to this tension is that the practical calling itself

becomes a vehicle for systematic lived inquiry within a co-operative inquiry format. Thus a transformative obligation and, for example, a transformative ritual themselves become inquiry vehicles. It is not just that the inquiry is *for* action. The inquiry is *in* the action, in the practical knowing how, in the transformative process of the will.

Heron does emphasise the ultimate desirability of the transformative and informative elements of co-operative inquiry to be “complementary, interdependent and interpenetrative”. However, he argues that “there is an asymmetry in the interdependence, and that transformative inquiry has a basic primacy”. (ibid: 125) Perhaps a ‘next stage’ to this particular co-operative inquiry would include an explicit exploration of the nature of the relationship between transformative and informative outcomes in inquiries which focus on spiritual dimensions and experiences.

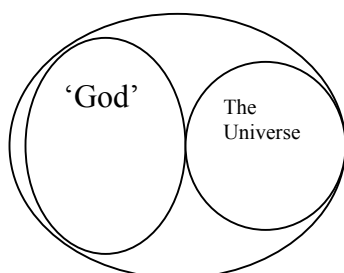
Heron’s ‘Participatory Theology’

Heron has developed a sophisticated ‘participatory theology’ which aims to present a way of understanding of the world which recognises and addresses the problems inherent in dualistic Christian thinking, and the monistic perspective generally integral to eastern religions. The following represents a summary of his argument.

Christian thought identifies a ‘God’ who has created a ‘universe and all its inhabitants’. God is present within that creation; but also exists as a separate and independent Being from it.

This means that human thoughts and actions take place ‘outside’ God – which leads to man’s capacity to be sinful, and to go against ‘God’s will’. Man’s aim is to learn what God wants him to do, and to live accordingly. Man cannot access God directly; Christ and God’s other representatives provide the means of communication to enable God’s will to be known.

However, it is not conceptually possible for God to be ‘all that is’ – but also create an entity that is apart from him. If God and the Universe He created are ultimately separate entities, there has to be a third order of reality that contains both God and the universe. So what is that reality?



Eastern religions tend to think that there is only one reality, which is spirit. Everything that exists is a form of that spirit. What does not appear to be spirit – that is, anything that has material form, such as trees and human beings, are in fact illusory, and do not really exist. Spirit has become estranged from itself, and forgets what it really is during the process of creating the universe; but eventually can return to full awareness of itself as absolute spirit. Consequently, although we experience ourselves and our lives as ‘real’, this is a delusion, which through various forms of disciplined practice, such as meditation, we will learn to realise. We do, however, need the help of already enlightened beings to enable us to achieve this end.

As an alternative to these, Heron promotes the idea of a ‘participatory theology’ that basically identifies just one reality; but sees all that happens within this reality as equally ‘real’. Heron names this reality the ‘divine’, which he sees as ‘an integrated One-Many reality including the spiritual, the subtle and the phenomenal’. (ibid: 8)

Heron sees consciousness as bipolar, consciousness and life, with neither being reducible to the other. Spiritual life is the life of the soul, and its immortal frame, and is manifest as the dynamic co-partner of consciousness (ibid: 91-94). ‘Subtle’ refers to energies and aspects of existence that have a presence beyond the material world, but which can permeate it in ways that people with psychic abilities can tune into. The ‘phenomenal’ is the material world, including the cultural and psychological dimensions of human life.

In perceiving the divine as including the spiritual, subtle and phenomenal, Heron is aiming to create a model of reality whose different dimensions participate in each other in ever changing and evolving forms. He suggests that:

- (People) participate in each other and in their immediate world. Each person’s participation is transactional, co-creative with divine being in shaping what there is, in articulating a subjective – objective reality. Person’s participating in each other shape an intersubjective reality.
- The distinctness of each person is inseparable from their participative engagement with wider unities of being.
- The participation of persons in the experiential being of the divine waxes and wanes. It is never totally absent. It is always to some degree explicit as a necessary condition of being in a world. It oscillate, above this necessary ground state, between fully intentional participative openness to immediate present experience, and blind alienated contraction within a closed egocentric self.
- Persons participate tacitly, potentially, in all other manifestations of the divine, in the spiritual life indwelling all manifestation, and in the spiritual consciousness transcending all manifestation. (ibid: 246)

Heron believes that, at least to a certain extent, this model addresses the problematic issues of both Christian dualism and Eastern monism. In contrast to Christian theology, it sees no separation between an all-powerful creator, and the human beings He has created. There is but one reality, in which all aspects of that reality are continuously engaged in a mutually participative co-creation. However, unlike eastern philosophies, nothing that happens is an illusion; it is all equally ‘real’. Everything that occurs is an aspect of the potential of the whole, which is and always has been there, translated into actuality.

Conceptually, there is much here that can be discussed and disputed. However, as is a principle throughout this thesis, I am wishing to avoid getting caught in a labyrinth of intellectual debates and arguments. Rather, I constantly seek to refine my intellectual understanding of the world in a way that is empowering; that supports my intuitive sense that there is much that I, and all others can do to improve the quality of life on this planet; and gives me guidance as to how I can do that. To this end, I found Heron's analysis useful, and resonant with my own experience. I had always felt as though there was ultimately only one reality, of which I only had partial sight. However, the evolutionary process is such that it is possible to develop a more comprehensive view. Perceiving our individual personalities and uniqueness as a manifestation of the 'flowering of the many on the ground of one' helps make sense of the idea of diversity within unity. Unlike the contention of the Eastern religions, it is not our existence that is illusory; rather it is our **belief** that any individual manifestation of the whole is separate from the whole, and that it is possible to exist independently of it, that is ill-founded.

To illustrate his point further, Heron creates a metaphor of an author writing a story. However, as this was to prove to be a significant stepping off point for a radical development in my thinking, I will return to this in the next chapter.

Returning to An Experiment in Depth

In reflecting on and evaluating the Co-operative inquiry, I was drawn back to P.W Martin's *Experiment in Depth*. I quoted this book at length in Chapter 4, identifying how significant it was in my early twenties, and how the direction I took in my 'inner search' was radically influenced after reading it. I returned to it, remembering how it promoted the principle in working in groups with others, and how, when I first encountered it, this had not been a possibility for me. Now, thirty years later, having been part of such a group, I was impressed by the connections I could make between the benefits Martin saw when advocating group participation, and what I had experienced within the co-operative inquiry process. The language in which it was written reminds me that it was published in 1955; however, the understanding it communicates seems much more contemporary.

I end this chapter by quoting at length another section of Martin's book. In terms of what I have so far written, I think the parallels between his views, and the experience of our co-operative inquiry group are self-evident.

Anyone undertaking the experiment in depth is well advised to (bring into operation) the fellowship of a working group....

There is the relationship of men and women engaged in the experiment who meet only occasionally, at long intervals, and then perhaps only for a short while. Such meetings have a special quality in that they bring the realisation, as nothing else can, of the process operating independently in others. And there is the relationship of the return, the banding together of like-minded people in the attempt to bring into the life of the world the vision they have found.

Needless to say, such a group relationship has little virtue so long as it remains merely at the *persona* level. Everything depends upon the relationship being made in depth. In practice, if a small number of responsible men and women meet together in the attempt to exercise their eyes, ears and understanding the other side of consciousness, the result is seldom banal. One of the surprising features of a group so formed is how the members of it grow together in a special kind of fellowship. This does not mean that all is harmony. Projections, positive and negative, there will certainly be. But if these projections are brought into the open, instead of being hidden away in the normal fashion, they lead to an understanding – of one-self and of others – to be achieved by no other means. And the characteristic quality of such a group is that projections can actually be brought into the open and seen for what they are.

A fellowship of this kind is of inestimable value. By talking to others of the activity the other side of consciousness a man is able both to separate from that activity and, by so doing, realise it better. At the same time, he is able to see his own experience against experience similar to, yet different from, his own: so that the all-too familiar pair of opposites – that he is mad or that he is God – are less likely to wreck him. The working group, moreover, gives stability. It helps to prevent the falling back into the banality which threatens as the first flurry of archetypal excitement is past. Still more important, it provides a firm hold on outer reality, a solid basis of human contact, against the disintegrating pull of the unconscious. Above all, the working group at its best brings with it that mysterious quality of being we inadequately call love: the love that is compassion in its literal sense, the suffering, the bearing, the sustaining, the undergoing, together. Such love is the drawing to wholeness, within a man and between men. (Martin 1955/1999: 236-237)

APPENDIX 2

**Edited transcript of DVD taken of
Group Meeting
November 2007**

Charney Manor

**Weekend Meeting of Transformative Living Inquiry Group
Charney Manor: November 2008
Edited Transcript**

I started the first 'formal' dialogue on Saturday morning by telling the group that I had two chapters still to write - one on the group inquiry; and one on the work that I was doing in relation to Transformational Leadership.

I suggested that for us as a group at this point in time, we forget the thesis, and focus our attention on what the value of belonging to this group had been. I stated that I knew it had been of huge value to me – but I had difficulty in articulating what that was.

Joan: Let's start from the premise that it had no value at all – that it is no different from any other group experience.

Clare: It's a very interesting starting point – how could we be sitting here if we had not had the enquiry? But I think I know what you mean.

Jenna: You were saying last night that you could not have done what you did on Thursday in relation to the seminars on leadership, if you had not had the experience of this group.

Joan: *(I summarised what I had been doing at work in relation to seminars on Transformational Leadership, as written about in Chapter 20.*

I then stated that I would not have had the confidence to work in this kind of way if I had not had the group experience. Whereas previously, I had often felt isolated and separate from others, I now felt that there was a level of connection between each and every person – and I had gained the confidence to act in all settings 'as if' this were true – and to act 'as if', at the depth of everyone, there was this desire to connect.)

Jenna: What is it that has enabled that shift in understanding to take place?

I remember sitting with you at Stanton, when we were teasing out exactly what a spiritual experience felt like and getting to a place where we had shared enough for me to understand that what you felt in that space felt similar to what I felt like in that space – and that felt very profound for me. That was one thing for me that showed there was an inter-subjective comparison that validated that experience. We can read what others write, and think it's the same; but unless we have the opportunity to tease out with someone else, it is not easy to compare.

Joan: We have got to some kind of foundation that we can communicate what is going on. That has not come easily. We are not a group of people who would have naturally come together – and we have had to work at that level of communication.

Edwina: I think it's because we all have a need to connect at that deep level – we all have that in common.

Joan: I might accept the hypothesis that we all **need** this – but does everyone **want** it? Isn't there a difference between 'need' and 'want'?

Clare: I am not really sure what a spiritual experience is. I have always known that there was 'something other' – and Joan didn't know

Joan: I **felt** there was, but didn't **know** it.

We then moved into a discussion about what it was possible to 'know', and how we could be sure that we knew. I shared my reservation about using that word – on the basis that (for example) suicide bombers and fundamentalists know that when they go to heaven they will have 21 virgins. They are so certain of their knowing, that they are prepared to die for it. I wondered how I could differentiate between their version of 'knowing' and mine. The group agreed this was a fundamental question.

Jen: How do I know things?

Joan: I accept all knowledge as provisional – I act 'as if'.

There then followed a discussion on the nature of knowledge; that since the age of Enlightenment, much had been gained in terms of 'ways of knowing', but also much had been lost.

We then spoke of a synchronistic experience the previous evening, when I had as I was leaving the house, decided to pick up a candle lighter (which I had never previously done). It transpired later that Christina, who had already arrived at Charney, had (at or around that time), been saying to others already there – 'ring Joan, and see if she can bring something to light the candles'. I had just started my journey, when I received the phone call.

Clare: I live my life as though nothing is by chance. I may be wrongbut it seems like knowing to me.

Jenna: Does the knowing not come with the knowledge that it might not be true – which is different from the conviction of the suicide bomber?

Christina: Meister Eckhart stated that the ultimate knowledge is unknowable. Part of what it means to be human is to touch the mystery – it's knowing what we don't know - the mystery of faith –how we are meant to live our lives, with this mystery, this knowledge.

Jenna: We're at the edge of that, I think, when we're struggling to find the words that to express something – express our experience.

Jenna: I find it difficult to articulate what the CI has played in relation to what all the rest of my life has played. One of the key things has been around the discipline of working in the group; the embracing and appreciating of diversity – getting to know Gilly, who is very different from me, in her artistic way of expressing things. This has expanded my tolerance, and my ability to appreciate the difference and its value. I think the connectedness in the group, knowing I was part of that connectedness, helped me stayed rooted as I was moving around the country, trying to find the job I was in. Many weekends, I felt very connected in myself; it's good to know I can have that in a group of people. I carry those feelings of connection with myself, and if I can begin to hold it more of the time, if I can experience this with patients; this comes about from practising and experiencing it.

Edwina: Would you have been different if you had not been part of the group? And how can we know?

Jenna: Indeed, how can we know? But there is something about what Joan speaks about – the reduction of isolation – being with others who have similar paths, similar questions, similar edges. Yes we have different ways of going about it – but we may do things that others can try.

Clare: There is a communion, an accompanying, a being with – a lot of this is about the power of friendship – being a companion.

Joan: If I am saying I have feel I have gained some level of strength from the group, that's helped me face some pretty challenging experiences, would others say the same had happened?

Christina: Yes – because the power of group is greater than the power of us individually – but they merge.

Joan: So what is it that creates that power? This is not just a friendship group – I have been part of friendship groups which have not given me this.

Jenna: So you have had two groups you could compare.

Joan: Yes.

Clare: But we came together for a purpose. Whether or not we have done a co-operative inquiry, I still don't know – we perhaps didn't do a CI in the John Heron sense – but a collaborative process did take place. We did have a level of commitment, discipline, in guiding what we did.

Christina: And the outcome was worthwhile.

Clare: There was a discipline in getting here. We have needed a discipline and purpose in the same way as a river needs its banks to prevent flooding and following its path.

Christina: My hunch is that there has been far more going on at deeper levels than any of us are really aware of – perhaps that is what is in the silence.

Edwina: While I was thinking in the break, I had some thoughts about the group; and it seems to me that instead of asking “how would we have been if we hadn't been part of the group?”, what about “How has the group changed from the beginning until now; the group itself as an entity?”. The group as a whole is different.

Clare: That's a useful way of turning it round, and helping us to look at it in a different way.

Clare: When we think about the ‘I’ becoming ‘we’ – Edwina's really saying, here we are as a ‘we’ – what does that mean?

Jenna: Does the group have an identity of its own?

Edwina: The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Jenna: That's the theory - how do we experience that in practice?

Christina: The group has taken on a life of its own – it does have an energy – it does feel as though it has something greater than all of us, it is really carrying us forward. Not in a direct way – but the qualitative difference when that was happening was powerful

Edwina: It seems like a process that has been built. It does not seem like any other group that I belong to, it doesn't feel like that.

Jenna: If the group has a life of its own, is that partly what was happening last weekend – a lot of people felt like it was coming to an end – the group itself went deeper and moved on, and made us stop and think – wo, its not finished yet.

Clare: Is this something close to what you have been talking about Joan - is it living in cosmic trust? Or to thine own self be true?

Jenna: I think something else happened beyond those two things – which was something to do (I'm grasping with concepts here) with the life of the group itself.

Joan: Is there in here a feeling of resilience – there is something too strong connecting it? We felt we were separating – but it would not break? This was beyond the individual?

Jenna: As though it is saying 'We are not done with you yet'?

Joan: Which relates to what you were saying last time, Christina, when you were asking "What work is it we have to do together?"

Christina: I have never once thought that there was no more for us to do together. I never wanted it to end. If it ended now, what's been gained, (in terms of gains in consciousness) – it will exist in the cosmos for eternity. I believe that it will, that it is very powerful – it exists as a very powerful entity – it is that which I feel we are all experiencing.

Edwina: Our vision statement, which was transforming the world through transforming self – the personal transformations we have each done – this has affected the group – this is not just affecting us personally – but how the group has experienced each person's changing being – this has made the group as it is – and this has in its way transformed the world.

Jenna: Are we now in a place where we can somehow as a group take this out into the world?

Chorus: I think we are doing that already.

Joan: I have already said that what has happened in this group has given me confidence. We were getting to something a moment ago – that something intangible (not material) exists that holds us together almost independently of ourselves as individuals.

Christina: I feel this really strongly – in fact, I have attempted to write about it, though not expressed it well.

Joan: This will probably have been expressed in spiritual literature – we are experiencing something for real that is spoken about in mystical texts.

Clare: I'm struggling to find words. It would be very easy for me to say that what happened last time was a rush of recognition that you were in need from us in group, to support you in working out something in your thesis. But as I'm talking, it also seems that the group had a need to be a part of what it is that you are writing about.Now I hadn't had that thought before I started to speak.

Christina: No, it's not one way.

Gilly: No.

Joan: But I was also responding to something I felt was in the group as well. ...I wasn't aware I had the need. (*Others come in to say that it was obvious from my response that I wasn't expecting what happened*). But it's like once it was there, there was a 'wow' – but I felt

something was happening in the group. It's as though you are moving away from something, and then suddenly you get pulled back in again to the centre.

Jenna: Some-one playing devil's advocate would say that we are just afraid of moving away.

Gilly: Yes, I had thought that earlier. But it seemed to me the dynamic was different from that.

Joan: I wasn't unhappy with where we were; I knew friendships would be retained, it didn't feel an unsatisfactory place to be.

Clare: What happened last time, was that it seemed to be that something wouldn't let us go.

Jenna: Is this an appropriate time to move into Bohm Dialogue to explore this? (12.35)

Jenna and I explain the principles Bohm Dialogue to others in the group who have not experienced it before: emphasising the need to hold the silence.

Gilly: What's the question we are focusing on at the moment?

Joan: Shall we take the question that Edwina raised. Instead of starting with 'what has the group meant to us individually', we look at the life of the group, rather than the life of individuals? I am wondering whether something can emerge from the group that is different from what emerges from individuals?

Silence

Edwina: I was actually visualising the swarming of birds – you know how starlings come together, and they work as a whole. How they each know, no-one knows; but they don't bang into each other, they work as a group, as though the group has a memory. Is what we experience something to do with that?

Silence

Joan: I think that's such a good example – I saw this recently on a nature programme, and sat and watched in total awe. It's too united – there has to be something keeping them together. Then suddenly, as if by mutual agreement, as though someone has rung a bell, they split up and separate.

Silence

Jenny: I wonder whether there is purpose beyond their coming together? Is there one?

Silence

Christina: In a sense, (I wish I could find a good way of saying this) - they are honouring creation by being who they really are – this is their true nature. Does this say something about the true nature of a human being? How do we honour creation, by being our true nature, by coming together for this for a higher purpose? I believe this could be touching on what it means to be truly human.

Silence

Gilly: To be truly human is not to act in isolation. The group may be that encouragement to being and becoming who we are authentically are, discovering who I am - but not out of relationship with others.

Silence

Joan: I think I am still reflecting on something intangible but powerful bringing us together. I refer to Ferrer in my thesis, who says that the spiritual experience is often seen as an individual thing; but actually the individual is participating in something that is universal, is there all the time.

Silence

Edwina: Thinking about the starlings, something holds them in a pattern, They can't be thinking individually – something holds them - and then it lets them go, and they lead their own lives. Then at some later stage they come together as a group again – but they are not held by anything tangible. They are held in the sky as a unit. As part of the oneness, as part of 'the everything', we are part of the dance of the universe. Something holds us in the pattern - we are part of the dance of the universe. Almost like morphic resonance – there are others people doing similar dances – different groups, but all doing the same kind of thing, with their own purpose. It's very, very difficult to express.

Silence

Gilly: It's difficult not to use words that are familiar, but also have other connotations. I suppose the word that comes to mind is divine energy, impetus, this dynamic – it is interesting that you use the analogy of birds, which are air-borne, spirit borne – what do we mean by spirit? We are spiritual beings.

Silence

Joan: Do they choose to stay connected, or does something choose for them to stay connected. Something comes in, then leaves them again. Whatever energy keeps them together, lets them drift apart.

Jenna: I am struggling with 2 ideas at the moment – one is that as a group comes together, it somehow opens a doorway onto another level of the collective (for want of a better word) and the other is, what is it when a group comes together that somehow leads into destructive interaction with the world, because groups do that out of instinct or whatever. One of the thoughts I had earlier was that, within a group, it is important that each person is true to themselves, and not just carried along by a group idea or identity.

Silence

Clare: There is something going round in my head about fear – the groups that come together in order to maintain some position are often very afraid of 'The Other'. In a way I can translate that across (I am still with the starlings) – scientists would say that purpose of starlings is that they should procreate, so there is a more earthy purpose of starlings. But there is also something more ethereal, or as Chrissie says, of honouring the natural world. I am not sure how to translate that into what has happened in our group.

Edwina: For me it is, what makes them do it? There must be some connection between them – some energy – that enables them to work in some way as a unit. There is something in them that connects with each other. At some point, they no longer need that, and disperse. I feel that that is how groups might function – they operate as a unit for whatever reason.

Silence

DVD 1 STARTS HERE (late Saturday afternoon)

Starting from left, going in clockwise direction – Christina, Joan, Clare, Gilly, Edwina, Gilly.

Jenna: There was a time when it felt as though I understood things differently from other people, and was therefore not meshed in the group. I guess there was a time when I wanted to explore our theoretical models; but then that became unimportant. It may be that I became more integrated in the group .

Silence

Joan: I suppose I am wondering whether you have any idea what's enabled us to move beyond that?

Silence

Jenna: I suspect it's a combination of acceptance within myself – and greater familiarity / knowledge / experience of one another at depth – a letting go of the need to understand things in my own way. I don't always understand why people are coming from where they are coming from. Perhaps with that exposure, I have not needed to fit everyone into my understanding.

Silence

Clare: If you take transforming the world through transforming self, it sounded like your participation in the group enabled you to transform yourself as an individual, rather than the other way round – or perhaps it's a two-way traffic.

Silence

Jenna: It's a 2-way traffic. It happens outside the group as well as through the group, it feeds out into work and life as well. I think that the group experience has contributed to transforming myself; and that transformation does contribute to interacting differently in the world.

Edwina: That's a very important statement – our interaction with the group changes us, and through our change the group changes. The whole thing becomes totally **interactive**. It's a constant change. Experiences in the group change us, and as we change, the group changes. It sounds important – not just one way.

Silence

Clare: What we don't know is what happened if one of the starlings act out of line. Does the group accommodate a starling that acts out of synch?

Silence

Christina: I'm remembering a time when I was in myself feeling very intense. All sensory input was quite amplified. I was observing in North Africa this immense flock of starlings, Just the listening – the intensity of the vibration – they were all making some sound as they are flying; the intensity was almost unbearable – it was beautiful but unbearable, it was so intense. When they go back to their individual lives, there is not that level of intensity. It is being in that cosmic dance that creates that vibrational level, that is so much more intense than when they are doing their individual things. I am thinking back to the last time we met; there was something about the intensity of the connection, that somehow transcended I think it's probably true to say,

any experience we have had of the group so far, even when we were meeting regularly as a CI group. Something to do with the unity – at a vibrational level when we were absolutely at one.

Silence

Edwina: I like the at one – at one-ness....

Silence

Joan: I still think this experience of Jenna's is important to look at – so what's been going on in the group. I remember that I thought at one time in the group, we needed to become more challenging.

Gilly: Challenge can be not absolutely confrontational, but an invitation. There are disparate parts of ourselves – we can unify them. I can be influenced / challenged by the way someone lives their lives. There may be influences within this group that do affect me.

Joan: Christina was feeling the intensity of the starlings; and I was feeling here that there was something else intense going on. Does anyone else feel this?

Gilly: Perhaps we need to relax into it.

Joan: I feel as though I am living at the edge of something. When I feel at that kind of edge, I feel a kind of intensity, which I am feeling now. I am seeing whether I am feeling this on my own, or whether it is a shared feeling.

Jenna: There is something powerful going on.

Edwina: I didn't want to say anything that would change that intensity. I felt it would be very easy to say something that could lead us off.

7 minute silence

Christina: For as long as I can remember, certainly from early childhood which I can only describe in some way as transcendent, I felt very strongly drawn towards any situation / dynamic that pitches one out of the ordinary towards more of an understanding of the truth, And those childhood experiences, because I was far too young to articulate them – I felt a sense of 'this is why I am here. this is what it is about'. As a human being, I am meant to find, to seek the truth, and what it is about – which is fast forwarding me through many other life times to this group. And the intensity that Joan spoke about – I personally feel something of this each time we meet together – there is a feeling of oneness. Not that we are all agreed on whatever; but because of the nature of what we are exploring, because of the qualities, the energies, and what we co-create – there is more, but I'll leave it there.

Silence

Christina: I will just add; I realise what I said sounds serious and ponderous – but at the same time, it is the dance, there is the joy and the playfulness; and the starlings seem to me to be in a state of ecstasy when they are flying in their formation. Part of our true nature of being human is to be joyful, and to take part in this beautiful dance, which is human. So it's always that interplay between what is serious and intense, which has to be part of it, because we are endowed with this wonderful developed consciousness that is capable of plumbing those depths – and at the same time, not lose sight of the fact that we are part of this beautiful dance, this interplay, this ying-yang harmony.

Silence

Clare: You were saying Chrissie, that when you were in North Africa, the intensity of the starlings was almost unbearable. I had been sitting there thinking that the intensity in this room was almost unbearable. I was also thinking of a conversation with my niece, which also seemed unbearable – in the sense that we were in this dialogue, where there was something very mutual going on. It was almost as though we were saying how much we loved each other, but didn't quite. After long pause, she then asked "so what are you doing for Christmas then?" It felt like a flow started again – of intensity and ordinariness. It's as though we can bear so much – in order to live our lives, we need that ordinariness. There feels a wonderful balance about it. I suppose what I am connecting into is that phrase 'co-creation'. I feel more conscious now about the co-creationism of this group. I'm not sure I quite know what I am saying – perhaps someone can help me out.

Silence

Joan: Just before you spoke, I was going to ask if people if they would mind sharing how they felt about that silence. Perhaps I should share how I felt. I thought that level of intensity was hugely profound – it became a meditation. We just moved into this – it was very profound – I am still feeling on this edge of an experience. I kind of felt – does this tell us something about life? We have been through struggles as a group. There are times when we have felt we are not moving – there have been many struggles over the years. We have been meeting like this for longer than the formal co-operative inquiry group met. I have been wondering what has been moving on through this process. I suppose it was resonating with me that this is what life is about – that I will get to that place that will make the struggle worth it. At times when I am really struggling with life, I have sometimes wondered if it is worth it. I spoke earlier of the choices we have; and I have at times thought of 'choosing' whether to have a breakdown. It is that faith that keeps me going – it reaches a resolution of something. Whether you take that quality into the world (did it influence your relationship with your niece?) – it does affect how I relate to others. I am wondering just how much more as a group we can do? I felt that in that silence, we reached a wonderful place in itself.

Edwina: I too was standing on the edge; then I wondered what happens if I drop off? Is there a fear in that - can I drop off or not? In jumping off, I was actually held in a place of love. That is what happened when I followed that through – just held.

Silence

APPENDIX 3

Contributions from members of Transformative Living Inquiry Group

When I was first drawn to joining the Co-operative Inquiry group (CI) I had no previous knowledge or experience of the method, but what I was clear about was how passionately I resonated with the aims of the inquiry. Here was the opportunity to explore the deep issues most dear to my heart – questions of truth, purpose, meaning – with a group of like-minded people. I had no hesitation in making the commitment – an intuitive inner certainty was propelling me forward.

In retrospect it is clear that this was the next step on my life journey; another portion of the 'Golden Thread' connecting the many and varied components of my life-long search for Truth. Although my search had often led me to join groups (for example my 10-year commitment to a Philosophy School), in the years immediately prior to joining the C.I. it had become somewhat introspective (e.g. meditation, journaling, studying alone, etc). Engaging with the C.I. process was a quantum step for me: my path widened and deepened in the most extra-ordinary ways. My journey became the group's collective journey – a journey older than time, that we share with all humanity – the deep longing for meaning, for Truth. I had become aware that something greater than ourselves was emerging – that the power of the group psyche had transcended that of the individual mind, enabling me to gain levels of insight I could not have attained alone. And I realised that my life was indeed transforming. As the process evolved and cohered I found myself gaining in confidence and self-belief, which has hugely benefited all aspects of my life, and continues to do so. What I would call "qualities of the soul", such as compassion, love, resilience, courage, inner peace and joy, etc were deepened and strengthened. Inner changes manifest outwardly – surely an affirmation of the authenticity of what we were researching?

To conclude: transformation is a process that begins on the inside and manifests outwardly. Life is a series of transformations bounded by birth and by death. The life journey itself is a journey of transformation – variously described as a journey back to the Source, towards the Unity (wholeness, perfection) from which we emerged; towards Enlightenment, or self-knowledge ("know thyself and thou shalt know the Universe"). It has to do with the very meaning and purpose of life, for we are all in movement. As individuals we may each follow a unique path, but every authentic path leads to the same truth. What the C.I. experience offered was the inner and the outer space to explore experientially and in depth the mystery and meaning of transformative living.

Christina, 28th January 2008.

From: Jenna
Sent: 27 January 2008 19:18
To: 'Edwina'; 'Joan'; 'Clare'; 'Christina'; 'Gilly'
Subject: RE: Everything!

Hello All looking forward to seeing you soon.

I feel guilty that I have not written anything for you Joan. My memory was that I/we had agreed to write something about what we had gained from the group. I was tired and having just been away for a week came back with some ideas. But like others putting them into words is another thing!

How can you (anyone) describe the sensation of a depth of interconnection with others, through our own and others expanded energies in openness, acceptance and, I want to say, expectation, but it is not expectation of anything in particular...potentiality, potency, support.....or perhaps the "L" word Love, impersonal and pure is more apposite. That depth of connection is an experience rare in the world, in everyday life, in family life, yet so affirming and nurturing just to have been in that level of connection with others strengthens a bond – a freeing, respecting linkage, a sense of having shared in touching something profound and special. Sages the world over have struggled to describe the *individual* spiritual experience and here part of what you are trying to describe is a *group* spiritual experience and the difference that this makes to the individuals as well as grappling with the question of whether the group itself has a life.

There is a point where words no longer suffice to describe – it's like the words on the paper being used to describe the paper, or the paperiness of the paper, whereas the issue is what it is like to experience BEING the paper.

At the start I had been keen to explore participative methods and at the "end" have a deeper faith in the emergent organic co-creative possibilities with the courage, willingness, aim to strive for this in other settings. Though without the commitment from others and the formal structures – Bohm dialogue, the rigour of trying to understand what each means, the deep listening and attention, even the belief that something useful, important, profound can emerge it is much more difficult in the "real world" where even the acceptance that the same things mean different things to different people has to be striven for and the completed idea receives more acclaim than work in progress.

Perhaps this is part of your struggle with the thesis? How to present something which still feels like work in progress (life and what it means to be you) as a "finished" idea or formulation. Most research papers in medicine end with the statement in one form or another that more research / information is needed – possibly a formalised way of saying it is all work in progress and this may be just one step on the way. You don't have to come to ONE FINAL BIG CONCLUSION, some steps are enough; whether you choose to outline the next questions is another issue.

Don't know if these ideas are of any use or untimely. Feel free to ignore them.

See you soon
 Lots of Love
 Jenna

From: Edwina;
 Sent: 12 October 2007 11:12
 To: Joan; Clare; Christina; Jenny; Joan
 Subject: CI

Joan

I have been reading through everyone's comments and this one from Jenna prompted me to send the following quote:

Jenna: Is there something about the necessity of being in a group (PW Martin - experiment in depth quotation) or the move outwards from solo existence/awareness towards group created energies (I'm struggling to grasp something here).

Andrew Cohen: The evolution of consciousness is not about the individual.

It's not the evolution of you, it's the evolution of we -the evolution of the consciousness that's being shared in the collective or intersubjective 'we' space between individuals. All relationships are based on shared values. So if you are interested in being a participant in the evolution of consciousness and culture, you need to ask yourself: What are the values that I share with all the individuals that I relate to? Who are the people with whom I share the highest philosophical and spiritual values, and how important are those relationships to me? If you want to find out how much you really care about creating the future, if you want to find out how evolutionary your own values actually are, than you have to look at the nature of all the committed relationships you're involved in, from your sexual relationships to your closest friendships to your family bonds to your professional connections.

It is the relationships that we engage in and the values we share that create the structure of the intersubjective dimension that is culture. So culture evolves through the cultivation of relationships with other people that are based on higher and deeper values. If you are really dedicated to creating a more evolved world, the future is no longer some far-off fantasy realm, but is something you forge in and through your relationships with other people right now. The intersubjective we space between such inspired individuals becomes a creative vortex in which something is being born every moment out of the spiritual, moral, intellectual, philosophical friction. There is a constant vibration that is inherently creative in the we-space between committed human beings who share a passion to create the future in the present moment. Together, you become a vortex through which evolution occurs.

Dear Joan et al

Having now had the opportunity to read Joan's update and each of the group's comments, I want to fervently respond to many of the questions posed and some of the reflections. Have we not all clearly said that outcomes may not be known or seen in any visible form? This is both exciting and difficult – for implicit in our endeavours has been the intention to transform ourselves and thus the world (à la Bohm's hologram idea).

The queries we have, the struggle for elucidation, articulation, mutuality, acknowledgement – respect, affection and trust, our unity of intention. All of these we have honed and shaped through our years of exploration through the sharing of our experiences – both past and contemporary. We have been engaged in certain personal struggles and challenges to our belief system, our purpose of being. To these and other ideologies, we have struggled and enjoyed each others uniqueness, perspective and intention. We have chewed our way through food and ideas – and still continue our journey.

Being the most right-brained member, I sometimes yearned for more creative expression of the sublime Divine, music, art, poetry, song, dance! I feared the Protestant work ethic might dominate; that the sheer intellect of the group might topple what felt like my fragile construction of reality and meaninga web woven from vibrating fibres, strong, but possible to break.

Certainly I reverberate to Joan's personal story and her journey. Her need to be true to herself and to her intuition and not the dictates of someone else's belief system, even though these were the powerful figures of her loving parents.

I too had a powerful urge, a deep longing to alleviate the pain and suffering, alienation and isolation I had both experienced, and which was clearly in the world around. Thus initially I identified with Joan in her endeavours to make a difference, though I struggled with ideas of how to accomplish that, especially as a young student nurse in London where there seemed little opportunity to explore or voice such concerns during the 1950's – it all went into the depth of my being lying unresolved for decades.

I have been greatly touched and affected by each and every member of our group. Each of us brings a gift, a quest, a commonality expressed in each, a profound regard of the other endearing, enduring – may it ripple through life.

Gilly, 3rd October 2007

From: clare
 Sent: 03 February 2008 20:19
 To: joan; Christina; Edwina; Gilly; Jenna
 Subject: Re: Orig contribribution

Hello Joan and everyone

I offer you a poem by a favourite poet, Denise Levertov:

PRIMARY WONDER

Days pass when I forget the mystery.
 Problems insoluble and problems offering
 their own ignored solutions
 jostle for my attention, they crowd its antechamber
 along with a host of diversions, my courtiers, wearing
 their colored clothes; caps and bells.

And then

once more the quiet mystery
 is present to me, the throng's clamor
 recedes: the mystery
 that there is anything, anything at all,
 let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything,
 rather than void: and that, O Lord,
 Creator, Hallowed one, You still,
 hour by hour sustain it.

You asked for something about what the group has meant to each of us.
 THIS is what it means to me: that we are each other's teachers, and
 each other's students, that I can grope after deep and tender feelings
 and communicate them to you all in the spirit of offering and in the
 knowledge of being received.

xxxxxxClare

APPENDIX 4

Article on Transformational Leadership

LEADING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Summary

Historically, organisations have often been viewed as if they are machines; and managers have operated as though they can control the parts of that machine (the employees) through a bureaucratised system of rewards and punishments. Those advocating transformational leadership have challenged this view. They have claimed that organisations will be more successful if employees' needs are recognised and valued, and they are empowered to play a greater role in decision-making. However, theories of transformational leadership have tended to focus mainly on the external behaviours of leaders and staff.

This article suggests that it is not only relevant for leaders to learn how to behave in the external world, but also to be aware of the significance of what they think and feel. In other words, internal states of minds and reflective processes have a direct influence on external actions. To gain a full understanding of the power and potential of transformational leadership, and to have the capacity to successfully lead transformational change, it is important to take a more holistic view of individual and organisational life, and develop an awareness of the relationship between inner and outer worlds.

Introduction

Transformational leadership is a concept that has been evident in organisational theory for nearly 30 years. James Burns is generally credited with introducing the term in his seminal book *Leadership*, published in 1978. In fact, his observations of leadership started with studying American presidencies; and it was when analysing Franklin D Roosevelt's ability to transform the people he was leading that the notion of transformational leadership was born.

Transactional Leadership: A Mechanistic Model

Burns contrasted transformational to transactional leadership, which appears similar to a bartering process: an employee agrees to do tasks in relation to an agreed reward (or punishment, if not achieved); with the leader having the main controlling power in the relationship.

Burns was influenced in his thinking by Max Weber, a prominent sociologist, who analysed in depth the kinds of authority that were exercised in corporate groups¹. The idea of transactional leadership came from Weber's concept of a 'rational-legal' authority, which he saw as leading to a bureaucracy.

¹ Weber, Max (1947) *Theory of Social and Economic Organisations*, Free Press

Rational-legal authority was based on a set of rules that had been intentionally and rationally put together, to ensure that the organisation operated as efficiently as possible, and required a hierarchical structure to enable its smooth functioning. The rules identified who had the power, and how extensive it was; it was the role that had significance, rather than the person. There were clear expectations of each person occupying each role, which were based on actions needed to maximise efficiency. The 'leader' occupied top position in the hierarchy, and had ultimate control over the whole. This was a model which was rationally planned; and if people behaved as instructed, there was no rational reason why the outcomes could not arise as predicted.

This approach to the management of an organisation can be viewed as a mechanistic model of leadership. Many managers have believed (and in some contexts, still do) that they can think of an organisation as if it were a machine; and can treat their subordinates as if they were parts in that machine. That is, subordinates would respond as directed in an environment where managers were seen to 'command and control'.

In a context where people undertake regular or automated tasks, and they are satisfied to carry out their work roles for an agreed reward, this model may be effective in supporting an efficient production process. However, human beings have minds of their own, and will easily choose to use them if they are not happy in their work environment. Consequently, the smooth functioning of the machine can be easily disrupted, with negative outcomes for the organisation.

Transformational Leadership: An Organic Model

James Burns introduced the idea of transformational leadership as a dynamic two-way relationship between leaders and followers. He states: "We must see power – and leadership – as not things but as relationships"². Burns is much influenced by Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human Needs and Motivation. This theory recognises that people have a range of needs, and the extent to which they will perform effectively in the workplace will be affected by the extent to which these needs are satisfied. There is also an awareness that any organisation exists within a wider social context, and that it needs to adapt to changing external conditions. Consequently, any leader, when seeking to achieve a successful organisation, should see it more as an organism existing as a living system, where internal and external factors affect its healthy growth and functioning.

An integral part of this process is to consider what action is most likely to motivate employees to give of their best to their work. Maslow identified that they would respond in so far as their physical and psychological needs were being met. He suggested that you could identify a 'hierarchy of needs', as represented in the left hand column of the following diagram. His suggestion was that lower level needs had to be satisfied to a certain extent before there would be motivation to achieve at the next level. So, the first priority was to meet physiological and safety requirements, before much investment was made in achieving the others.

The second column identifies how an organisation may meet needs at each level.

² Burns, 1978, p 11

Self-Actualisation The need for personal growth & fulfilment	Work is felt to be a satisfying and meaningful aspect of life, where talent and potential are recognised and fulfilled.
Self-Esteem The need to achieve, be recognised and have status, etc.	Being able to set and achieve goals Having good work formally recognised and appreciated
Belonging The need to be loved, included, have good relationships, etc	Feeling part of a team Social events encouraged Importance of good relationships between staff recognised and fostered
Safety The need to feel secure, be protected, have stability, etc	A safe working environment Protective clothing if necessary Good contract of employment, including sick pay, pension and health care
Physiological Basic life needs – for air, water, food, shelter, sleep, sex, etc.	Salaries / wages Pleasant working conditions

Burns felt that a transformational leader would facilitate the meeting of needs at both the lower and higher levels. He stated:

A leader not only speaks to immediate wants but elevates people by vesting in them a sense of possibility, a belief that changes can be made and that they can make them³.

Many writers and academics have responded to the concept of transformational leadership, and developed their understanding of what it means in organisations. John Kotter is one such person. His biography on his own website⁴ does not underplay his role in leadership theory and practice.

Harvard Business School Professor John Kotter is widely regarded as the world's foremost authority on leadership and change. He has been the premier voice on how the best organizations actually "do" change.

³ Burns, 2003 p. 239

⁴ www.johnkotter.com

John Kotter's international bestseller *Leading Change*—which outlined an actionable, 8-step process for implementing successful transformations—became the change bible for managers around the world. In October 2001, *Business Week* magazine rated Kotter the #1 "leadership guru" in America based on a survey they conducted of 504 enterprises.

Kotter's identifies an 8-Step process for successful leadership of change, which addresses all levels of Maslows' hierarchy, in particular the higher ones. His model can be summarised as follows:

Set The Stage

1. Create a Sense of Urgency.

Help others see the need for change and the importance of acting immediately.

2. Pull Together the Guiding Team.

Make sure there is a powerful group guiding the change—one with leadership skills, bias for action, credibility, communications ability, authority, analytical skills.

Decide What To Do

3. Develop the Change Vision and Strategy.

Clarify how the future will be different from the past, and how you can make that future a reality.

Make It Happen

4. Communicate for Understanding and Buy-in.

Make sure as many others as possible understand and accept the vision and the strategy.

5. Empower Others to Act.

Remove as many barriers as possible so that those who want to make the vision a reality can do so.

6. Produce Short-Term Wins.

Create some visible, unambiguous successes as soon as possible.

7. Don't Let Up.

Press harder and faster after the first successes. Be relentless with instituting change after change until the vision becomes a reality.

Make It Stick

8. Create a New Culture.

Hold on to the new ways of behaving, and make sure they succeed, until they become a part of the very culture of the group.

Kotter's framework includes the main qualities and principles that are seen to be included in most books and articles on transformational leadership. It is a process which focuses on the development of relationships. As a consequence, it values teamwork, a shared vision, and empowerment of all. It encourages mutual respect, participation in decision making to achieve agreed ends; and in many cases, encourages others in the team to play a leadership role also.

The major limitation in Kotter's (and other) models is that it focuses very much on what leaders should aim to achieve; but does not pay particular attention to the internal qualities and processes involved which enable leaders to be transformative in their behaviour. In addition, there seems to be an assumption that the transformational process applies to other people and the wider organisation; but not necessarily to the leaders themselves.

However, it could be seen that this could present a partial view of transformation. Is it possible to 'do unto others' without necessarily being influenced oneself? And if it is accepted that the leader will also be affected, what does this mean in real terms; what is the nature of the relationship between self-transformation, and facilitating the transformation of others?

Transformational Leadership: A Holistic Model

This model of leadership suggests that you cannot separate the individual from the team; the team from the organisation; or the organisation from the wider society to which it belongs. Everything is ultimately interconnected; and a change in any one part of the whole influences every other part. This differs from the principle of the mechanistic model, which suggests for example, that if there is a problem with one part of the system (e.g. a problematic member of staff), you simply remove that part, and replace it with another without any impact on the rest of the system. However, the holistic model will recognise that the member of staff who is sacked may have alliances within the organisation, who then react adversely to the change; or may have strengths that are missed when not present. It is not possible to take one person out and replace them with another without some ripple effects – which may turn out to be beneficial or detrimental, or a combination; but will be there.

A holistic model also recognises that what is going on internally within a person will influence their attitudes and behaviour. At a basic level most people will be aware that, for example, when things are not going well at home, their behaviour at work may well be affected; they are shorter tempered, their mind drifts more easily to other places, etc. At another level, when leaders engage in processes such as empowerment, valuing others, encouraging mutual respect, and enabling the realisation of a shared vision, the ways in which they do this will be greatly affected by a number of factors.

These will include whether their value base corresponds with the values underpinning the planned behaviour; whether, for example, they truly believe that others should be respected; whether they genuinely wish to encourage a participative form of decision-making; or whether though their intentions are good, old patterns of behaviour lead

them to act in less facilitative ways; or high stress levels cause them to be more controlling than they intend.

A person acting from a transformational model of leadership requires a much wider range of qualities and skills than is required of a person operating from a mechanistic model of leadership. Within a 'command and control' environment, leaders can in the main operate as autocrats, telling people what they should do and when; they hold the ultimate power, and if others wish to earn rewards and avoid punishments, they merely do as they are told.

Empowerment

As a transformational leader, the skills are more complex, varied and subtle. It also requires an interpretation of terms. 'Promoting empowerment' for example, may be understood in different ways. Some will see it as a form of delegation, where the leader has determined and communicated the vision, identified what needs to be done to achieve it, and gives others the authority and responsibility to implement the plan. Others might take a wider view, in that they involve people in the creation of the vision, and encourage participative decision making. They give individuals the autonomy to act creatively, and do not sanction them if they take risks and make mistakes, but rather see this as part of a mutual learning process.

A range of variations of what is meant by 'empowerment' could be developed. Much depends on the mindset of the leader, what they really believe is the purpose of what they are doing, and what they use as the guide to their actions.

For some, guidance is gained from reading and hearing other people's ideas and theories; in the main, they acquire their knowledge from external sources. Others, though, rely more on their own resources and inner authority. This latter group often have practices and techniques that support them in this process.

The Inner Path of Leadership

Consciously accessing resources from within has been termed by some the ‘inner path of leadership’. Simon Smith describes it as follows:

We all have unrealised potential within ourselves, which we can use to transform and improve our organisations and our lives. Unfortunately, it often remains unrealised. Most people underestimate themselves, not realising the qualities and potential they possess. Even fewer know how to access these. *Inner Leadership* will enable you to recognise the deep resources you have and apply them, taking the lead wherever you are in your organisation.

Corporate transformation can only take place where there is individual transformation. As Dr W Edwards Deming said: “Nothing changes without personal transformation.” Yet personal transformation has not been within the remit of organisations. People are required to see themselves and their organisations in a wider or different context before change can take place, but scant attention has been given to how to achieve this. When a number of individuals practising inner leadership come together, they can combine in a far more powerful, creative and effective way than ever before⁵.

Peter Senge, founding Chairperson of the Society for Organisational Learning, and author of the widely acclaimed book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* has recently co-written a book entitled *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organisations and Society*. The authors believe that ancient ideas of leadership have been inappropriately neglected. For example, the core of Confucian theory of leadership formation rests on the idea of the ‘cultivation of self’.

If you want to be a leader, you have to be a real human being. You must recognise the true meaning of life before you can become a great leader. You must understand yourself first⁶.

A further extract from this book outlines what these authors see to be important and why:

We have to nurture a new form of leadership that doesn’t depend on extraordinary individuals. ..We need to learn the disciplines that will help cultivate the wisdom of the group and larger social systems. ...In a world of global institutional networks, we face issues for which hierarchical leadership is inherently inadequate.....As models of leadership shift from organisational hierarchies with leaders at the top to more distributed, shared networks, a lot changes. For those networks to work with real awareness, many people will need to be deeply committed to cultivating their capacity to serve what’s seeking to emerge.

That’s why cultivation, ‘becoming a real human being’, really is the primary leadership issue of our time, but on a scale never required before. It’s a very old idea that may actually hold the key to a new age of ‘global democracy’⁷.

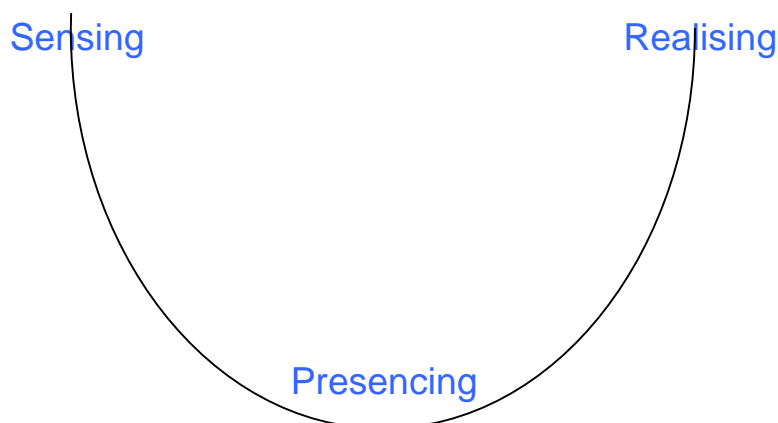
Senge et.al have a model of practice which they see as supporting this idea of ‘individual cultivation’ – which they call the ‘theory of the U’.

⁵ Simon Smith (2000) *Inner Leadership* Nicholas Brealey

⁶ Peter Senge, et al (2005) *Presence: Exploring Profound Change in People, Organisations and Society*

⁷ Senge et al.

The process is simply reflected in the following diagram:



Sensing

The first stage, ‘sensing’, is being aware of what is going on around you; observing any changes taking place. This would be a time when practical action is undertaken to assess what was going on for an organisation: for example, undertaking a ‘SWOT’ analysis – that is, identifying the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that need to be taken into consideration when developing a strategic plan. As far as is possible, habitual ways of thinking are suspended, to enable you to gain a more expanded view of the situation you and your organisation is in. Observation of all that is going on is the major element here.

Presencing

The next stage is to ‘retreat and reflect’. This is the phase that is probably most commonly omitted as a conscious process in traditional theories of management and leadership. Many theories will at this point look at decision making techniques. However, Senge et al suggest: “the rational calculus model of decision making and following through pays little attention to the inner state of the decision maker”. They call this process “presencing – seeing from the deepest source and becoming a vehicle for that source.” They develop their explanation of presencing as follows:

When we suspend and redirect our attention, perception starts to arise from within the living process of the whole. When we are presencing, it moves further, to arise from the highest future possibility that connects self and whole. The real challenge in understanding presencing lies not in its abstractness but in the subtlety of the experience.

We chose the term ‘presencing’ to describe this state because it is about becoming totally present – to the larger space or field around us, to an expanded sense of self, and, ultimately, to what is emerging through us⁸.

Realising

⁸ Senge et al

In most theories of change or leadership, the leader is seen as separate from what they are seeking to change. They can then feel frustrated, because events don't happen as they plan, others resist the changes, and their attempts to realise their 'vision' can be thwarted. However this theory suggests that the more a person is able to access the deeper parts of their consciousness, the wiser and more effective their action is likely to be. It promotes the ability to 'act in a natural flow'.

It's almost as if I'm watching myself in action. I'm both engaged and simultaneously detached. When that happens, I know there will be magic.

The chronic shortcoming of many planned change efforts is blind adherence to 'the plan'. The magic arises because our awareness is expanded and the source of our intention has shifted. Just as moving down the U requires refraining from imposing pre-established frameworks, moving up from the bottom of the U involves not imposing our will. Operating from this larger intention brings into play forces one could never tap from just trying to impose our will on a situation.⁹

So reaching the top of the U involves trusting ones intuitive as well as rational judgement; and the suggestion is that the more time and space given to deep inner reflective processes, the more the action that emerges is likely to be right for both self and the whole.

Leading with Wisdom

Because the 'inner path of leadership' focuses on less tangible processes than rational theories of management promote, it has often been called the 'spiritual' dimension of leadership. Others avoid using this term, because it has connotations of religious belief, and they do not necessarily want what they do and believe to be thus interpreted. However, if the term 'spiritual' is viewed in a more expanded sense, it gives people a wider range of language to explain what it is they feel is the relationship between their inner world and external organisational practice.

Peter Pruzan and Kirste Pruzan Mikkelsen have formally interviewed 31 top executives from 15 countries in 6 continents¹⁰. These people all feel comfortable with the use of the term spiritual, and give their experience of how they feel spirituality and rationality can go hand in hand: a truly holistic approach to leadership and life.

The business leaders interviewed by Pruzan and Mikkelsen suggest that there is much more going on in the lives of many top executives than might be suggested by conventional theories; their contributions do not just focus on their behaviours, but rather give us a greater sense of the connection between inner and outer worlds; and use language not common in organisational texts.

For example, Ricardo Levy grew Catalytical from a consulting firm into a Silicon Valley-based pharmaceutical and energy company with 1,600 employees, three factories and a market capitalisation of UA\$750 million in the late 1990's. He states that his world became extremely complicated, and he turned to spiritual practices to

⁹ Senge et al

¹⁰ Pruzan & Mikkelsen (2006) *Leading with Wisdom: Spiritual-based Leadership in Business*

obtain the sense of peace and fulfilment that no amount of business success could provide. Over the years, these practices included meditation, reading spiritual literature, t'ai chi, practising humility, quieting the mind, and living in the unknown.

I think the problem with leaders in our Western business is that we are not aware of the need to go inside. We have to connect with a much more human universe and be willing to take the time that is needed to make our decisions from this deeply felt inner guidance. Deep inside we have a humility compass and we must have a way to tune in to that compass repeatedly, especially as we grow and begin to have successes in business.¹¹

Stephen Covey is the author of the hugely successful book entitled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which has sold more than 15 million copies in 38 languages throughout the world. He attributes his success as a business leader and leadership authority to his dedication to 'principle-centred living and spiritual-based leadership'. He says:

Let's see if we can follow the principles of fairness, kindness, respect, the development and use of people's talents, having meaningful work, and living with integrity. Let's see if we can agree upon these, let's go to our hearts and our souls and live with integrity.

To be a spiritual-based leader is to have these universal principles integrated in your inner life and to be true to them in your actions, even when it's dark – when you have power over people and can do things and not be found out. When you have that integrity, then you have peace of conscience. Peace of conscience is much greater than peace of mind. It means that you are truly true to that which you have internalised as being right and that gives you tremendous courage.¹²

Andre Delbecq was Dean of the Business School of Santa Clara University in the USA; and is now Director of its Institute for Spirituality and Organisational Leadership. He states: "The only way I have found to deepen the consciousness of self and organisation within the context of leadership is through meditative / contemplative practice".

He talks about working with his students:

It is wonderful to watch the increased inner peace of the MBA students and executives who spend time with me at Santa Clara University, even when they have a day that in the past they would have considered to be a day of misery. They develop the capacity to see that even struggles have meaning. They find that there is something to learn in every moment, and by remaining in touch with their inner peace even during trials, they are able to bring a different presence to the challenges. They know all too well that without spiritual awareness such challenges would lead to burnout and dysfunction. So spirituality is no longer a separate part of their lives; it is no longer peripheral to their leadership.

So for me, spirituality is less a matter of definition; it is more a matter of sharing our deep, lived inner experience that one taps into and draws from in every aspect of life, including professional/organisation efforts. The spiritual journey includes the choices you make in the unfolding inner journey. True spirituality seeks to avoid any dualism

¹¹ Pruzan & Mikkelsen

¹² Pruzan & Mikkelsen

between the inner self and outer action. Our actions dealing with the secular and mundane are part of the spiritual journey.¹³

Throughout all interviews, the importance of integrating inner and outer worlds as the basis for enabling truly transformational leadership is repeatedly emphasised through the stories of these influential and successful leaders.

Modern Science

A similar acknowledgement is arising out of an understanding of the implications of modern science. For example, Margaret Wheatley in her book “Leadership and the New Science” examines in depth what recent findings in science have to tell us about processes of change, and the need to see life as a whole.

The new sciences are filled with tantalizing and hopeful processes that foster change. Laying aside the machine metaphor, with its static mechanisms and separated parts, scientists saw something new. They saw the underlying processes that give rise to innumerable and different life forms (p.139)

She sees participation as being a key element:

Everywhere in the new sciences, in living systems theory, quantum physics, chaos and complexity theory, we observe life’s dependence on participation. All life participates in the creation of itself, insisting on the freedom to self-determine. All life participates actively with its environment in the process of co-adaptation and co-evolution.

Wheatley contends that we need to alter how we perceive ourselves and our relationship to the world:

If we are to ally ourselves with these life’s extraordinary capacity for change, we need to shift our thinking; Although we see change at a material level, it is caused by processes that are immaterial. We must look for these invisible processesThis shift in orientation requires learning to live in a process world. Life demands that I participate with things as they unfold. (p 153)

She talks about Morihei Ueshiba, the founder of the marital art of Aikido, who highlights the quality of attention – we must keep participating in the moment. The changing nature of life insists that we stop hiding behind our plans or measures, and give more attention to what is occurring right in front of us, right now. We need to become curious about what’s going on, what just happened. The present moment overflows with information about ourselves and our environment.

Modern science shows us that we are moving irrevocably into a new relationship with the creative element of life. If we are developing a way of leading organisations that encourages greater autonomy and self-determination, people will feel free to get things done; and a different order will arise; an integrated system that “can resist most demands for change at the global level because there is so much internal motion”.

¹³ Pruzan & Mikkelsen

Wheatley describes what she sees as the means by which stability will be maintained:

The motion of these systems are kept in harmony by life's great cohering process, that of self-reference. While new in science, self-reference has been an enduring concept in human thought. In Greek times, the Delphic Oracle greeted supplicants with this principle engraved in marble: "Know Thyself". And Shakespeare counselled, "This above all to thine own self be true". So contemporary science is merely bringing to light a wisdom that has been with us for millennia. We see the world through who we are. All living beings create themselves and then use that "self" to filter new information and co-create their worlds. We refer to this self to determine what's important for us to notice. Through the self, we bring form and meaning to the infinite cacophony of data that always surrounds us.

Yet it is very important to note that in all life, the self is not a selfish individual. "Self" includes awareness of those others it must relate to as part of its system. Even amongst simple cells, there is an unerring recognition that they are in a system; there is a profound relationship between individual activity and the whole.

Conclusions

The challenges facing leaders of organisations in these rapidly changing times are major. Most contemporary theories of organisational change acknowledge that traditional styles of hierarchical management, with the emphasis placed on maintaining existing systems and procedures, are no longer 'fit for purpose'. A proactive approach to change is required if an organisation is to survive and thrive.

Increasingly, transformational leadership is promoted as the means by which such change can be led and facilitated. However, most of the existing literature focuses on a dualistic model, where the leader behaves in a particular way to gain the desired response and involvement of followers. We need to understand in greater depth the relationship between the mindset of the leader, the actions taken, and the effect on others and the wider organisation.

The demands on leaders are so great that many acknowledge they need to have a deeper understanding of how to respond. I have suggested in this article that in order to lead transformational change, leaders need to engage in a transformational learning process themselves. There are many sources that can provide information and processes to help this learning process, including, perhaps unexpectedly, such diverse areas as science and spirituality. The main principle, I contend, is to recognise the interconnectedness of all aspects of life, visible and invisible, inner and outer. If we approach our learning and development with this mindset, take a holistic approach to individual and organisational life, and trust our deeper intuitive process, there will spontaneously emerge successful ways of leading transformational change.

APPENDIX 5

‘Email Marketing’ article

7 Benefits of Transformation Leadership



7 Benefits of Transformational Leadership

**If You're Serious About Developing Your Leadership Skills
....*Then this report is for you***

Welcome to the beginning of a journey

There are many leadership theories around. Some suggest that people tend to have one dominant style – for example they are autocratic, or democratic, or laissez-faire

Others suggest that a good leader will use different styles in different situations. So sometimes they tell people what to do, and sometimes they let them get on with things in their own way. A talented leader, these theories maintain, is one that consistently chooses the right style for the person and situation they are dealing with.

Transformational Leadership takes these ideas further. It suggests that in a rapidly changing world, there is not a fixed set of skills that you can hold up and say: “If you learn these, you will become a good leader”.

Rather, it proposes that because organisations need to adapt to meet the shifting demands placed on them by the external markets, changes in society, new regulations and so on, they need dynamic leaders who are personally responsive to the major challenges that constant change presents.

Consequently a Transformational Leader needs to develop a wide range of skills and qualities such as:

- The ability to think imaginatively and creatively.
- The ability to assess what is going on in a situation quickly, and rapidly adapt their plans accordingly.
- The ability to tap into the experience and wisdom of others while trusting their own intuitive responses.

Now that might sound a little daunting to you. It might even seem to confirm the common perception that leaders are “*born*” not “*made*”. But in my experience *everybody* can be a Transformational Leader at some level in the situations that they find themselves.

So what makes a Transformational Leader?

I think you can boil the answer down to four key traits. A Transformational Leader is a leader –

- Who is continuously learning
- Who inspires
- Who engages the commitment and participation of others
- Who is authentic, and who leads by example

In the rest of this report I’m going to set out seven major benefits of Transformational Leadership (there are others). I hope as you start to learn about them, you will realise that you can develop the four key traits and you will be inspired to begin that journey.



Joan Walton

**Director
Bordesley Institute**

P.S. Before I go on, I should make a couple of things clear.

Firstly, you don't have to be the head of a large organisation to be a leader. If you've got a couple of people reporting to you, you are just as much a leader to them as the head of a multi-national mega-corporation. And just so you're clear, your leadership is probably more important to them than the CEO or Managing Director or anyone else higher up the management chain.

Secondly, many people I meet these days don't have any staff who formally report to them, but they still have a responsibility to get things done. They've usually got the challenge of trying to persuade and influence others to do things for them, they've got titles such as project manager, client executive, account coordinator, product manager, resolution coordinator, and so on.

If this is you, then what will make the difference between success and failure is your ability to "lead" your "virtual" teams.

During the many years I've been working with organisations, helping them to develop the leadership potential of their people, some of the best "Transformational Leaders" I've met have been working within these types of roles, making a far bigger impact than their job title or level in the organisation would lead you to believe was possible!

Benefit 1

Improving motivation and morale

Many people think that money is the main motivator for everyone employed by their organisation. But for most people this isn't the case. Stop and think about it for a moment, is this what drives you? Is this what really drives the people around you?

Frederick Hertzberg said that if people don't have an adequate wage or salary, they will be dissatisfied but money on its own is not enough to satisfy.

Abraham Maslow took Hertzberg's ideas a stage further. Maslow said we have 5 different levels of needs, which could be represented as a 'hierarchy'.

Level 5	Self-Actualisation The need for personal growth & fulfilment	Work is felt to be a satisfying and meaningful aspect of life, where talent and potential are recognised and fulfilled.
Level 4	Self-Esteem The need to achieve, be recognised and have status.	Being able to set and achieve goals. Having good work recognised and appreciated.
Level 3	Belonging The need to be loved, included, have good relationships.	Feeling part of a team. Social events encouraged. Importance of good relationships between staff recognised and fostered
Level 2	Safety The need to feel secure, be protected, have stability.	A safe working environment Protective clothing if necessary Good contract of employment, including sick pay, pension and health care.
Level 1	Physiological Basic life needs – for air, water, food, shelter, sleep, sex, etc.	Salaries / wages Pleasant working conditions

Figure 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's contention was that the lower level needs had to be satisfied to a certain extent before the level above would start to be a motivation. So, the first priority was to meet people's physiological needs and make them feel safe, before there was much point investing in helping them achieve the higher levels.

A Transformational Leader recognises that **all** these levels need addressing, not just the first two or three. It is only when an organisation reaches a stage of development where continual attention is paid to Level 5, such as acknowledging people's desire to have their talents recognised and potential developed, that you begin to see the full commitment of your staff to what you are trying to achieve.

One highly influential method of raising morale and motivating people is to have an organisational Vision that is shared by all employees; a vision which inspires them, and describes a world they all want to be part of. A powerful vision strikes a chord in people and motivates them to do what they can to make it happen!

Martin Luther King expressed his Vision in his often quoted speech, 'I Have A Dream'. He appealed directly to people's imagination, enabling them to vividly 'see' what the

possibilities were that existed. Through both the power and passion of his communication, and the desirability of what he envisaged, he inspired an entire nation to address the inequalities in American society through landmark civil rights legislation. By the way, Martin Luther King was a local vicar in Atlanta, he had no direct authority to tell anyone what to do! He was a leader because he *inspired* others to follow him.

People will rally around you if you have - and articulate - a compelling vision and a clear sense of purpose that they can share in. Transformational Leaders create this sort of Vision for their organisation - a Vision which resonates with the people who work for, and with you. Through it, you will begin to gain their commitment to turning it into reality.

Now before we go on, I should point out that just by coming up with a “Vision”, you aren’t going to solve all your motivation and morale problems overnight. And not everyone can be as compelling with words as Martin Luther King!

But if you don’t have a vision of where you’re going, then neither will your staff, or your project team or whoever else you need motivate to get the job done. Everyone will simply drift along with the same gripes and moans, bumbling about in the lower levels of Maslow’s hierarchy and nothing much will ever change!

As you learn how to be a Transformational Leader, you will learn how to maximise the motivation and morale of your staff, so that all their energy at work will be spent on doing their job well.

Benefit 2

Promoting great teamwork

The point of being part of a team is that it enables individuals to achieve far more than they ever could on their own. This is what we mean by ‘synergy’, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts - on top of which, being a member of a good team is enjoyable, rewarding and fun.

People need to feel connected to others as we saw in Maslow’s hierarchy. Many people consider that being part of a team is the best thing about their job and what makes it worthwhile getting out of bed in the morning. So promoting teamwork can be another way of encouraging and motivating people.

When they’re building and maintaining great teams, Transformational Leaders focus on a number of specific areas:

1. Establishing agreed goals, objectives and an action plan

A team cannot work well if its members don’t agree about the goals and objectives they are trying to achieve - we’re back to Vision again. But it’s also important that the team members are committed and motivated to achieve them. Generally, team members feel more committed to the goals, objectives and plan and are motivated to achieve them, if they have been involved in the process of agreeing them i.e. they feel they “own” them. So you need to pay attention to:

- Collaboratively agreeing what the goals and objectives are with your team.
- Drawing up an Action Plan, which includes what is to be done, by when, by whom, and when the plan will be reviewed. Again the team needs to be committed to the plan.
- Being aware of factors that might help and hinder progress, and taking these into consideration in the planning process.

Another PS here: this doesn’t mean you let your team come up with any old goals and objectives! They still have to meet the needs and expectations of the organisation!

2. Enabling open and honest communication

One of the greatest problems in teamwork is the fact that people have difficulty being open with each other – and find it much easier to bitch behind other people’s backs than deal with the real issues! Team members must be committed to being honest about issues that annoy and frustrate them; but need to have the skills to communicate these in a positive and helpful way.

As a Transformational Leader, you need to create an atmosphere in the team that allows this sort of communication to take place.

3. Providing mutual support and developing trust

If open and honest communication can be developed, then trust and mutual support will be easier to foster. Feeling you can trust other team members is one

of the most precious qualities a team can have, and contributes at least as much as anything else to effective working relationships. However, trust is something that takes a long time to build, and seconds to shatter; so it's a quality that needs to be given a lot of focus in the team development process.

4. Having a constructive response to situations involving conflict and interpersonal tensions

Let's face it, having disagreements is an inevitable aspect of life. It's not the disagreement itself that is a problem; it's how it is handled. If people develop the appropriate skills, and respond to problems constructively, then there can be positive outcomes. Valuable learning can come out of conflict situations if they're well-handled. On the other hand, a conflict that's not dealt with, or is handled badly, creates situations which fester, and can ultimately be disastrous to the well-being of the team – and in turn, to the wider organisation.

5. Developing the knowledge and skills of each individual

In order to maximise the 'synergy' of a team, it's important that each individual is operating at an optimum level of competency and confidence. Consequently, paying attention to individual development needs makes a significant contribution to the success of the larger whole.

And we can all learn something!

6. Scheduling regular reviews and evaluating progress

Without regular dates in the diary to review progress against our initial plans, it's very easy for goals and timescales to slip – indeed the review date will often focus people's minds. Review meetings are essential to ensure a team achieves what it set out to achieve, or at least to be clear about the issues causing problems, and to be motivated to find solutions to those problems as quickly as possible.

7. Building good relationships with other groups and teams

It's no good if a team works very well internally, but at the same time, its perceived 'cliquishness' creates difficulties with other parts of the organisation. As with individuals, no team operates in isolation, it's always part of a bigger whole. If the wider organisation is adversely affected, then the benefits of a team that works well internally will be nullified.

Similarly, there needs to be good relationships with people from other organisations if the benefits of good teamwork are to be recognised beyond the team's own boundaries.

Benefit 3

Improving communications

Poor communication is one of the biggest gripes in many organisations. One major issue is that many people feel they are not given all the information relevant to their role, that decisions are made without their involvement and that important messages are somehow lost in the system.

Alternatively, they may feel that too much is communicated! They get overloaded with constant emails, memos etc. much of which is not relevant to them. When you think how much information flows around the organisation in a day, you can see how easily this could happen.

Everyone is so busy that it is often difficult to ensure that the right people receive the right information at the right time; and conversely, those who don't need it don't get it!

Another factor affecting communication is that people may lack the appropriate expertise. Some staff may not be good at expressing themselves in writing, so any records or reports they produce are badly structured and written. Others may have interpersonal skills that leave a lot to be desired. For example:

- They lose their rag easily, and get into arguments and conflict situations with others.
- They are arrogant, and think they know best, so get other people's backs up.
- They are good at speaking about other people behind their backs, but will not deal with issues to their face.
- They are quiet and never let you know what they are thinking and feeling.

A transformational leader will recognise what is happening, and will put in place strategies that will help. For example:

- Making efficient use of time through meetings which are properly planned and chaired, and where issues can be openly discussed and problems resolved.
- Providing people with development opportunities to learn verbal and non-verbal communication skills so they can express themselves well.
- Involving their staff in putting in place systems and procedures for exchanging information.

Benefit 4

Helping people to cope better with change

This is one of the greatest challenges facing organisations today. Most leaders have accepted that change is here to stay. John Kotter in *Leading Change* says:

“The rate of change is not going to slow down anytime soon. If anything, competition in most industries will probably speed up even more in the next few decades.”

However, most people find change difficult to handle. Peter Drucker, in *Management Challenges for the 21st Century* sums it up well:

"Everybody has accepted by now that change is unavoidable. However that still implies that change is like death and taxes — it should be postponed as long as possible and no change would be vastly preferable. But in a period of upheaval, such as the one we are living in, change is the norm."

A major part of the problem is that change is stressful. This is because it represents uncertainty and insecurity. There is a strong feeling that it's 'better to have the devil you know' than to risk the unknown.

This problem only increases when change is handled badly – for example when:

- Leaders are not specific about what changes will take place.
- Staff are not clear why change is necessary.
- Those affected by the change are not involved in the process of discussing, planning and implementing it.
- There is a lack of communication to keep people up to date as to what is happening and why.

The Transformational Leader not only recognises that change is inevitable, but realises that successful organisations will have in place strategies for ensuring that these potential difficulties are looked at and prepared for.

When facing any change process, they will create a plan of action which will ensure:

- Excellent communication takes place, including being given accurate and full information as to the reasons for the changes.
- Those affected by the changes are properly prepared.
- People are given sufficient opportunity to air their anxieties about the changes.
- We help people identify what support they need to help them respond to the changes and move on constructively and positively.

Transformational Leaders know that failure to lead and manage change effectively can seriously hamper important developments in the organisation. This can result in demotivated staff, resentment and even sabotage. Consequently, they take action to ensure all staff are engaged and involved from the outset.

Benefit 5

Reducing staff turnover and days lost through sickness

People leave their jobs for a range of different reasons:

- They're bored – and there are no opportunities for further development.
- They don't get on with the people they work with – disagreements and conflict are not resolved, and situations fester.
- They don't agree with the vision and ethos of the organisation.
- They feel that what they do is not valued.
- They don't feel that they are given enough support.
- They feel overworked and exploited.

People get stressed and go off sick for similar reasons. But perhaps due to age, lack of qualification, or just plain apathy, they can't or won't get another job.

However, if an organisation –

- Provides development and promotion opportunities for its staff.
- Ensures they are valued and rewarded for good performance.
- Provides them with the leadership and support to ensure they feel engaged in meaningful and productive work.
- Provides them with opportunities to give feedback on what they find good and not so good about their job, and responds seriously to what they say.....

.....If an organisation does all these things - who wants to move to another job?

They will feel that there is no better place to work, and they will want to help themselves and the organisation grow.

That's the power of Transformational Leadership in changing the lives of the people who work with and for you!

Benefit 6

Becoming a Transformational Leader means transforming yourself which is an exciting journey in itself!

It is your own development as a Transformational Leader that lies at the core of the success of your organisation. The power of transformational change, whether it's of an individual, team or organisation, derives from each person paying attention to their own attitudes and behaviour, and living according to the principle 'the wellbeing of the whole is my responsibility too'.

If everyone takes the time to reflect on how they can improve their practice in whatever role they play, ensuring that what they do supports and builds on the actions of others, an organisation cannot fail. And it is you as a Transformational Leader who acts as a positive role model in this respect. You have potentially the most influential position. It is you, as a Transformational Leader, who can really make things happen.

That isn't to say that it's easy. Far from it, I can't give you a set of magic bullets or quick fix checklists that will turn you into a Transformational Leader overnight!

It requires a lot of hard work and commitment, particularly to learning, developing your knowledge and skills, understanding your own attitudes and motivation. It means developing your own understanding of how to:

- Communicate an inspirational vision.
- Ensure that everyone buys into the vision.
- Encourage people to participate in the process of agreeing goals and how they can work together co-operatively to achieve them.
- Live with a constant awareness of what is going on in the wider organisation.
- Access and trust your own deeper intuition and inner wisdom to help you make good decisions.

All of these and more are the skills and qualities that facilitate transformational change. As leaders, we usually underestimate what it is possible to achieve. Organisational life can provide us with a context to develop all our talents as human beings. The following was written by Marianne Williamson (often wrongly attributed to Nelson Mandela):

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.” We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do... It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we subconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others’.

This gives us some serious food for thought! But if we live with the consciousness that everyone is capable of more, and what we as Transformational Leaders need to do is provide the encouragement and practical support to enable them and us to improve, then think what the possibilities might be!

Benefit 7

Ok, Ok, so, at the end of the day it's got to help with the bottom line – or delivering on our service mandate if we're a public sector or not-for profit organisation

Having got this far and read about the first six benefits of Transformational Leadership, I hope that you will by now be able to see exactly how your organisation can be more successful.

As I said earlier, this isn't easy, but the people I know who have persevered to become Transformational Leaders – and by the way, they all think they have more to learn now than when they started - have highly motivated staff who:

- Are inspired by a common vision.
- Work to the same goals.
- Have the encouragement and opportunity to develop the skills they need to do their job well.
- Feel that their work is meaningful and that what they do is valued.
- Enjoy the pleasure and emotional rewards of being part of an effective team.
- Participate in the planning and decision making of major change initiatives.
- Believe they are being led by a visionary leader who knows that by serving their interests they are also serving the best interests of the organisation.

By embarking on the journey to become a Transformational Leader, how can you or your organisation fail to excel in achieving its purpose? How can you fail to be the best there is?!

And finally

I hope you've found this report useful. It's not supposed to be the final word on Transformational Leadership – indeed the idea that there is a “final word” would go against the basic principles – I wrote it to provoke your thoughts and start you on the journey.

What I really hope, is that you will have been inspired to learn more; to start exploring, asking questions and developing your knowledge and skills.

We at Bordesley Institute have been developing resources to help you in that journey. We're on a journey ourselves, looking for and developing new ideas; discussing and debating them with our friends and colleagues who are out there putting Transformational Leadership into practice.

If you want to learn more about us or Transformational Leadership, please visit our website or join us at one of the free seminars we run from time to time – check the website to find out where and when.

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